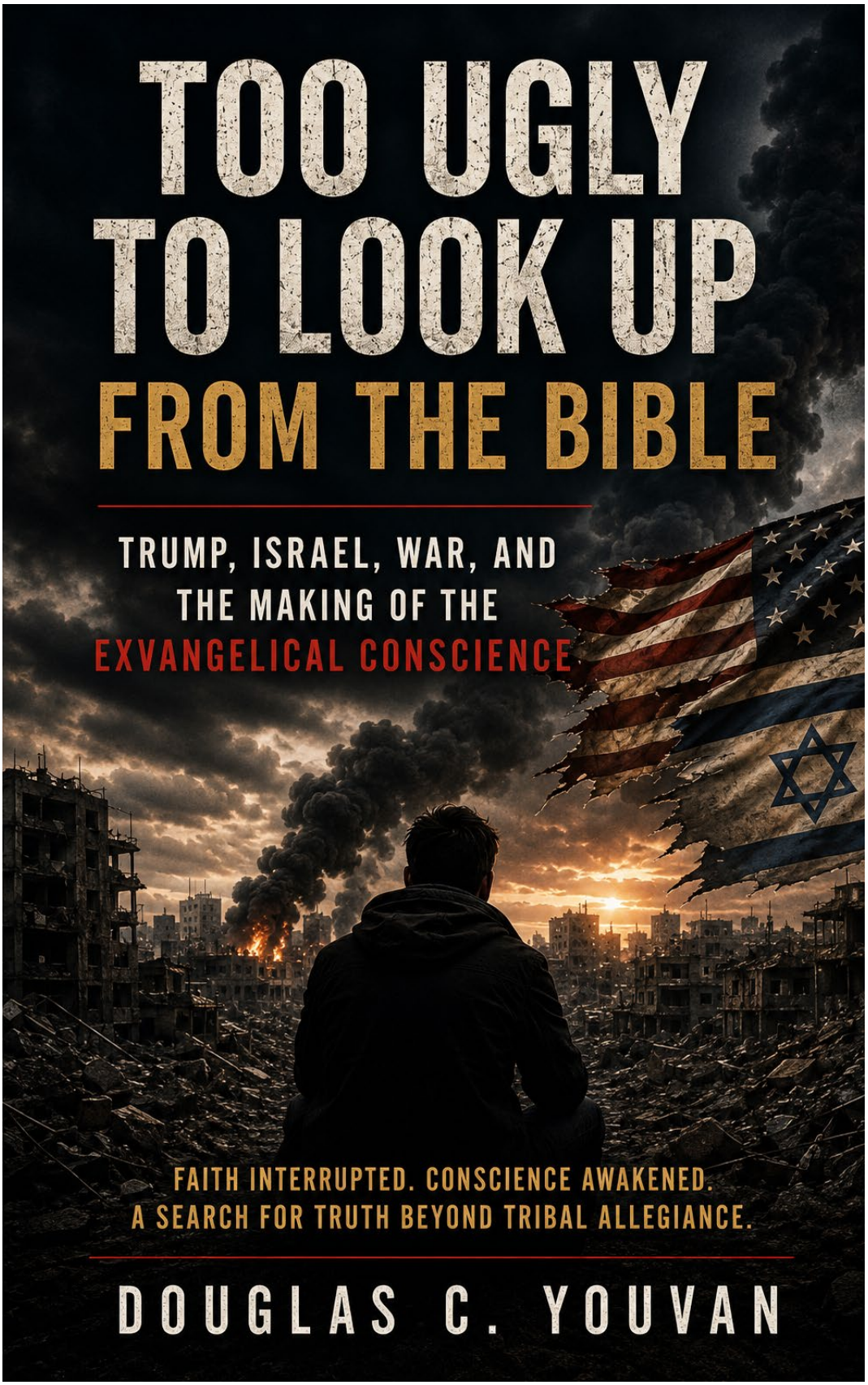
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DOUGLAS C. YOUVAN

Too Ugly to Look Up from the Bible: How Trump, Gaza, Iran, and Christian Power Are Creating Exvangelicals

Douglas C. Youvan

August 1, 2026

Google Drive: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15Kd8bUjm7zVaKdVIwbPhqjjV68aUZQvc

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https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4206-4253

173 pages

Author's Note

This book began with a question that was personal, theological, and political at once:

Are Donald Trump, the war with Iran, and evangelical support for Israel's destruction of Gaza creating exvangelicals—people who may still believe in God but can no longer remain inside the evangelical identity that formed them?

The question does not have a simple statistical answer. No national survey can yet tell us precisely how many people have left evangelical churches because of Trump's spiritual advisers, the religious justification of war, or Christian Zionist responses to Palestinian suffering. The argument of this book is therefore not that every exvangelical has followed the same path. People leave churches for many reasons. Some lose belief in God. Some reject doctrines concerning sexuality, gender, science, biblical authority, or salvation. Some have been injured by clergy, congregations, or families. Some simply drift away.

This book examines a particular kind of departure: the person who leaves evangelicalism because religious belonging has begun to require the betrayal of a conscience formed by Christianity itself.

Such a person may continue to pray. He may still believe in God. She may still follow Jesus, read Scripture, seek forgiveness, and hope for a life beyond death. What has collapsed is not

necessarily faith, but trust in the people and institutions claiming exclusive authority to define faith.

The political and legal events discussed here remain contested and, in some cases, unfinished. Israel rejects accusations that it has committed genocide in Gaza. The International Court of Justice had not issued a final judgment on the merits of South Africa's genocide case when this book was completed on July 31, 2026. The term *genocide* is therefore used carefully: as a grave legal allegation, as a conclusion reached by some international investigators and scholars, and as a moral description adopted by many Palestinian voices—not as a final judgment already rendered by the Court.

This book also distinguishes Jewish people, Judaism, Israeli citizens, the modern State of Israel, its government, and Christian interpretations of Israel. Criticism of an Israeli government is not a judgment against Jews. Antisemitism is real, ancient, adaptive, and deadly. Nothing in the defense of Palestinian humanity requires its denial.

The same distinctions apply elsewhere. Iranian civilians are not identical to Iran's government. American citizens are not identical to the administration acting in their name. Evangelical believers are not identical to the most aggressive leaders speaking for them. Trump voters do not all possess the same motives, theology, or moral character.

The subject of this book is not an ethnic people. It is not a nation considered as a single personality. It is not every evangelical church or believer.

The subject is a political theology: a system through which rulers, nations, wars, territorial claims, and enemies are placed inside a sacred narrative and protected from ordinary moral judgment.

The book asks what happens when a believer finally looks up from that narrative and sees the people standing—or dying—outside it.

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Introduction

I Still Believe in God

I have not stopped believing in God.

That sentence may be the beginning of a new kind of exvangelical confession.

The person who speaks it is not announcing a conversion to atheism. He is not saying that science has disproved God, that the Bible has become meaningless, or that Jesus no longer matters. He may still pray. He may still feel addressed by Scripture. He may still believe that reality has a divine ground and that human beings remain answerable to a truth greater than themselves.

What he can no longer believe is that evangelical institutions reliably represent that truth.

He has watched leaders who once insisted that character mattered excuse conduct they would have condemned in anyone else. He has watched humility become weakness, cruelty become strength, dishonesty become strategy, and political victory become evidence of divine favor. He has watched spiritual advisers surround a president not to confront him but to explain why God has chosen him.

He has watched support for Donald Trump move through a sequence.

First, Trump was defended despite his character.

Then he was defended because God uses imperfect people.

Then his imperfections became evidence of God's mysterious selection.

Then attacks upon Trump became attacks upon God's chosen instrument.

Finally, Trump's political decisions—and even his wars—were placed inside a struggle between the kingdom of God and the forces of evil.

At some point, the believer asks whether the church is still placing political power beneath God or whether it is placing God in the service of political power.

The question becomes more urgent when missiles begin to fall.

A Christian may vote for a morally compromised politician because every political choice appears compromised. He may support some policies and oppose others. He may regard a particular military action as necessary while grieving its consequences.

But something different happens when spiritual authorities declare that the violence itself belongs to a biblical drama.

Iran becomes Persia.

Trump becomes Cyrus, Esther, or another providential deliverer.

A strategic conflict becomes spiritual warfare.

Political enemies become cosmic enemies.

Military success becomes evidence of divine approval.

At that point the believer is no longer being asked merely to support a policy. He is being asked to sanctify it.

Gaza produces an even deeper rupture.

For many American evangelicals, the modern State of Israel is not regarded as merely another nation. It occupies a place within prophecy. Biblical promises made in ancient settings are applied directly to modern borders, governments, settlements, wars, and territorial claims. Support for Israel can therefore become more than a foreign-policy preference. It becomes evidence of biblical fidelity.

This creates an extraordinary moral danger.

If a modern government has already been assigned the sacred role, its conduct cannot easily alter the believer's allegiance. Its actions may be criticized tactically, but the central narrative remains protected. Palestinian death, displacement, hunger, and dispossession enter the theology as secondary facts. They may be acknowledged emotionally without being permitted to change the conclusion.

The Palestinian does not need to be openly hated in order to disappear.

He needs only to be made theologically irrelevant.

A family may have lived on the land for generations, but an ancient promise is treated as more authoritative than the family's living presence.

A child may die beneath the rubble, but prophecy is treated as more real than the child.

A church may have worshiped in the region for centuries, but the testimony of Palestinian Christians is granted less authority than the interpretation of an American prophecy teacher who has never lived under occupation or bombardment.

The sacred map becomes more real than the people living upon it.

This is the central moral accusation of this book:

The truth on the ground has become too ugly to look up from the Bible.

The sentence is deliberately unsettling. It may initially sound like an attack upon Scripture. It is not.

The problem is not that evangelicals read the Bible too seriously. The problem is that a particular interpretive system can use the Bible to prevent reality from becoming morally intelligible.

The reader is told that the Bible speaks plainly. Yet the supposedly plain meaning has been prepared by pastors, study notes, seminaries, prophecy charts, publishers, broadcasters, political organizations, donors, and inherited assumptions. These influences disappear at the moment the interpretation is experienced as divine certainty.

The believer says, “The Bible tells me.”

But the Bible never arrives alone.

It arrives through translation.

It arrives through tradition.

It arrives through a community that has already decided which passages control the others.

It arrives through political fears, historical memories, cultural loyalties, and institutions with material interests.

It arrives through people who claim that their interpretation is not an interpretation at all.

This is how *Sola Scriptura* can become something very different from its stated purpose.

The Reformation principle was meant to place religious institutions beneath Scripture. Popes, councils, theologians, and rulers could all be judged by a truth beyond themselves. Properly understood, this should make Protestantism resistant to political idolatry.

But when an institution’s reading of Scripture is treated as identical to Scripture itself, the principle reverses direction.

The Bible no longer judges the institution.

The institution determines what the Bible is permitted to mean.

Trump becomes an imperfect vessel chosen by God.

Modern Israel becomes biblical Israel without remainder.

Iran becomes Persia.

The Palestinian becomes an obstacle to prophecy.

Political opponents become demonic.

Contrary evidence becomes persecution, propaganda, or spiritual deception.

The system becomes self-sealing. Every apparent success confirms it. Every failure can also be interpreted as confirmation. If Trump triumphs, God has favored him. If he is prosecuted, he is being persecuted. If war succeeds, providence is vindicated. If war expands, Satan is resisting the divine purpose. If prophecy fails, the timetable was misunderstood—but the method that generated the false certainty remains untouched.

A system capable of explaining every possible outcome cannot recognize when it is wrong.

That is not faith.

It is immunity from correction.

For some believers, the recognition comes slowly. It may begin with discomfort over Trump's conduct, then deepen through immigration policy, political violence, Gaza, or war with Iran. The believer continues defending the institution until the accumulated contradictions become too severe.

He was taught that truth matters because God is truth.

He now sees religious authorities defending falsehood because it serves their coalition.

She was taught that every human life possesses sacred value.

She now sees foreign civilians converted into abstractions.

He was taught that rulers stand beneath divine judgment.

He now sees spiritual advisers placing biblical identities around the ruler until criticism appears to be opposition to God.

She was taught that repentance is indispensable.

She now sees institutions demanding repentance from individuals while refusing to confess their own pursuit of power.

The conscience protesting these contradictions was not formed outside Christianity.

The church helped create it.

This is why the person may leave evangelicalism without leaving God. The departure can result from taking Christian moral claims seriously after Christian institutions have made those claims conditional.

The person does not necessarily say:

“I no longer believe.”

He may instead say:

“I still believe, but I no longer believe you.”

That sentence marks the collapse of religious authority without necessarily marking the collapse of faith.

It also creates an unusual relationship with the former evangelical self.

The person who leaves cannot honestly treat that earlier self as a stranger. The beliefs were real. The loyalties were real. The excuses were real. The blindness was real.

“I was an evangelical” may not say enough.

The deeper confession may be:

“I am an evangelical because evangelicalism remains part of the person I became. I am responsible for what I defended in that name. I am also an exvangelical because I can no longer consent to what the identity now requires.”

The evangelical self becomes the person placed before God.

The exvangelical self becomes the person the institution can no longer command.

This book follows that person through the collapse of certainty.

It examines the bargain between Trump and evangelical power, and how that bargain developed into a theology of providential leadership. It examines the spiritual advisers who act less like prophets confronting a king than courtiers assuring the king that God approves.

It examines the war with Iran as a possible source of moral injury—a wound created when trusted religious authorities ask believers to approve conduct that violates the moral convictions those authorities once taught.

It examines Christian Zionism and the theological disappearance of the Palestinian. It distinguishes concern for Jewish safety from unconditional allegiance to an Israeli government, and criticism of government policy from antisemitism.

It examines *Sola Scriptura*, closed biblicism, and the hidden interpretive network that teaches believers to experience political conclusions as the plain speech of God.

It also asks what might remain after the enclosure breaks.

Can Scripture remain without biblicism?

Can faith remain without certainty?

Can Christianity remain without Christian nationalism?

Can concern for Jewish life remain without Christian Zionist absolutism?

Can opposition to Iran's government remain without sacred war?

Can a person reject evangelicalism without rejecting Christ?

The constructive proposal of this book is expressed in another phrase:

Solus Logos.

The final authority is not the institution, the ruler, the nation, the reader, or even an interpretation protected by the claim that it came directly from the Bible. The final authority is the living truth Christians call the Logos—the Word who cannot be reduced to a printed sentence, a political platform, a sacred map, or a national destiny.

The Logos is truth and therefore cannot require lies.

The Logos becomes flesh and therefore cannot make bodies irrelevant.

The Logos is crucified and therefore stands in judgment upon religious power allied with the state.

The Logos cannot be possessed by Trump, evangelicalism, Israel, the United States, the exvangelical critic, or this book.

Every interpretation remains answerable.

Every government remains answerable.

Every church remains answerable.

Every conscience remains answerable.

This does not provide the comfort of infallible political conclusions. It provides something more demanding: the possibility of repentance.

The reader may discover that looking up from the Bible is not necessarily looking away from God.

The Palestinian, Israeli, Iranian, migrant, soldier, dissenter, evangelical, and exvangelical all exceed the roles assigned to them by political theology.

The human face interrupts the sacred map.

The neighbor interrupts the prophecy chart.

The suffering body interrupts the claim that everything is unfolding according to plan.

And perhaps the God whom the believer feared losing is encountered not inside the enclosure but among the people whom the enclosure had made invisible.

This book is written for those who still speak to God but no longer trust those who claimed the exclusive authority to speak for Him.

It is written for those who left because remaining would have required a deeper departure—from conscience, mercy, truth, and moral responsibility.

It is written for the person who can no longer defend the evangelical self but cannot pretend that self was someone else.

It begins with a confession:

I still believe in God.

I no longer believe that certainty is the same as faith.

I no longer believe that political power is evidence of divine favor.

I no longer believe that cruelty becomes righteous when committed by my nation.

I no longer believe that prophecy makes dead children invisible.

I no longer believe that refusing to see is the same as trusting Scripture.

I have looked up from the Bible.

The world has not become empty of God.

God has become harder to control.

Chapter 1

The Bargain That Became a Theology

American evangelicals did not initially need Donald Trump to be a good man.

They needed him to be useful.

That distinction made the alliance possible.

Trump did not speak naturally in the language of evangelical faith. He did not display the habits of repentance, humility, biblical knowledge, sexual restraint, or devotional seriousness that evangelical leaders had spent decades presenting as evidence of Christian character. He often appeared indifferent to those standards, and at times openly contemptuous of the expectation that he should submit to them.

For many evangelical voters, none of this was hidden.

The original defense was practical. Politics required choosing among imperfect candidates. Trump promised conservative judges, opposition to abortion, support for religious institutions, resistance to progressive cultural change, a harder line on immigration, and strong support for Israel. Whatever his personal defects, he might still protect evangelical interests more effectively than candidates who spoke with greater moral refinement.

This argument did not require admiration.

It required calculation.

A believer could say:

I do not approve of this man's character.

I do not regard him as a Christian example.

I do not trust everything he says.

But I believe the policies he will enact are less harmful than the alternatives.

Democratic politics often involves compromises of this kind. Voters routinely support candidates whose conduct, temperament, or judgment they do not wholly admire. An evangelical could have voted for Trump while maintaining a clear moral distance from him.

The alliance became spiritually dangerous when that distance began to disappear.

The reluctant bargain developed into a theology.

Trump was no longer merely a flawed politician whose usefulness outweighed his faults. He became a providential instrument. The very qualities that had initially required explanation were incorporated into a sacred narrative.

His aggression became courage.

His refusal to apologize became strength.

His political survival became divine protection.

His enemies became persecutors.

His defeats became spiritual attacks.

His victories became evidence that God had chosen him for a particular hour.

The shift was gradual enough that many believers may not have noticed it happening.

First came the argument that God uses imperfect people.

This claim is unquestionably present within the Bible. Biblical history is filled with morally compromised rulers, reluctant prophets, violent men, deceivers, outsiders, and unlikely instruments. Divine purpose does not depend upon human perfection.

But the claim can be used in two very different ways.

It can humble the powerful by reminding them that being used by God does not make them righteous.

Or it can protect the powerful by suggesting that their unrighteousness is irrelevant because God has chosen them anyway.

In Trump's case, the second use became increasingly common.

The biblical figure most often invoked was Cyrus, the Persian ruler described in Isaiah as an instrument through whom God accomplishes a purpose for Israel. Cyrus was not an Israelite king. He did not need to share Israel's covenantal faith in order to serve a providential role.

The analogy offered evangelical leaders a solution.

Trump did not need to be morally exemplary.

He did not need to speak evangelical language convincingly.

He did not need to repent publicly.

He needed only to accomplish the political tasks assigned to him.

The comparison appeared modest because it admitted his defects. Yet it created a nearly unlimited exemption. If Trump was another Cyrus, then criticism of his character could be dismissed as a failure to understand how God works through unlikely people.

The more unlikely the instrument, the more remarkable the providence.

Trump's lack of evangelical virtue therefore ceased to count strongly against him. It could even strengthen the narrative. His unfitness made his success appear more miraculous.

This reasoning altered the moral order of evangelical politics.

For decades, conservative Christians had argued that private character mattered in public office. A leader's sexual conduct, honesty, fidelity, self-control, and respect for moral law were treated as relevant to the exercise of power. Evangelical leaders did not regard these as optional personal virtues disconnected from government. They presented character as a predictor of trustworthiness.

Under Trump, those standards became negotiable.

The change was not merely that evangelicals failed to live up to their principles. Every religious community contains inconsistency. The more consequential change was that leaders revised the principles so the inconsistency no longer had to be confessed.

Dominance became leadership.

Mockery became fearlessness.

Cruelty became a willingness to fight.

Dishonesty became refusal to submit to hostile media.

Legal accountability became persecution.

The absence of repentance became evidence that Trump would not be controlled by the political establishment.

What had once been condemned as moral failure could now be praised as political authenticity.

The bargain was becoming a conversion—not necessarily Trump's conversion to evangelical Christianity, but evangelical Christianity's conversion to Trump's understanding of power.

From Protection to Dependence

The alliance deepened because each side possessed something the other wanted.

Trump had political power but lacked religious legitimacy.

Evangelical leaders possessed religious legitimacy but believed they lacked sufficient political power.

Trump offered judges, access, recognition, executive action, media attention, and protection against cultural enemies.

Evangelical leaders offered votes, organization, prayer, biblical symbolism, and a moral story in which Trump's rise meant more than ordinary political success.

The exchange benefited both.

But it also created dependence.

The more evangelical institutions invested in Trump, the harder it became to criticize him without discrediting themselves. Every defense increased the cost of future independence.

A pastor who had told his congregation that Trump was God's instrument could not easily admit that the instrument had become dangerous.

A ministry that raised money by presenting Trump as the defender of Christianity could not easily acknowledge that the defense had corrupted Christian witness.

A spiritual adviser whose authority rested partly upon access to the president could not easily risk that access through public confrontation.

The alliance became self-protective.

Trump needed evangelicals to interpret him.

Evangelical leaders needed Trump to validate their political importance.

Each party's legitimacy became entangled with the other's success.

The result was not merely a coalition.

It was a court.

The Evangelical Court

The biblical prophet stands in a difficult relationship to power.

Nathan confronts David.

Elijah condemns Ahab.

Micaiah refuses to repeat the favorable predictions of the royal prophets.

Jeremiah warns rulers who believe that possession of sacred institutions guarantees divine protection.

John the Baptist rebukes Herod and loses his life.

The prophetic adviser does not exist to make the king feel chosen.

He exists to remind the king that he remains judged.

Court theology reverses that relationship.

The ruler is not brought beneath God.

God is brought near the ruler.

Religious advisers explain the leader's success, suffering, enemies, and ambitions as parts of a sacred story. They do not necessarily produce systematic theology. Their function is more immediate: to reduce the moral distance between what the ruler wants and what God is said to require.

The ruler's opponents become enemies of the faithful.

The ruler's legal troubles become persecution.

The ruler's survival becomes evidence of divine protection.

The ruler's instincts become providential discernment.

The ruler is no longer merely prayed for.

He is interpreted.

This distinction is crucial.

Christians have prayed for rulers across centuries, including rulers they opposed. Prayer can express concern for wisdom, restraint, justice, and peace. It does not necessarily indicate endorsement.

Court prayer performs another function. It surrounds the ruler with sacred recognition. The image of ministers placing their hands upon a president tells the public that this person stands within a special spiritual purpose.

The prayer may contain words of humility.

The political image communicates consecration.

Spiritual advisers become dangerous not because their religious practices seem unusual to outsiders. Charismatic prayer, prophecy, belief in miracles, speaking in tongues, or emotionally intense worship does not by itself make a leader politically irresponsible.

The decisive question is what the spirituality does in relation to power.

Does it confront the ruler or flatter him?

Does it defend the vulnerable or make them disappear?

Does it call the nation to repentance or assure the nation of innocence?

Does it submit violence to moral judgment or convert violence into divine purpose?

Does it preserve the difference between God and the president?

Or does it make the president's cause increasingly difficult to distinguish from God's cause?

The danger begins when access replaces prophecy.

A spiritual adviser who cannot risk exclusion from the court is unlikely to speak freely within it.

The Persecuted President

One of the most powerful transformations in Trump-era evangelicalism has been the elevation of political opposition into religious persecution.

Trump has faced investigations, prosecutions, hostile media coverage, political attacks, public ridicule, and intense opposition. Some accusations against powerful people may be exaggerated, partisan, selective, or unfair. No president ceases to possess rights because he holds power.

But court theology does not merely ask whether Trump has been treated justly.

It places his suffering inside the story of sacred persecution.

The comparison between Trump and Jesus represents the most extreme version of this move.

Christianity traditionally presents Christ as the judge of rulers and as the victim of cooperation between political and religious authority. He is not the emperor surrounded by priests. He is the condemned person subjected to state violence with religious approval.

When Christ's suffering is used primarily to explain the experience of a president, the direction of Christian sympathy moves upward.

The ruler becomes the victim.

The people affected by his policies recede.

This does not require anyone to proclaim Trump divine. The process is functional rather than formal.

He becomes uniquely chosen.

He is persistently persecuted.

He is miraculously preserved.

He is indispensable to the survival of the faithful.

He is opposed by forces larger than ordinary political disagreement.

His defects cease to disqualify him because they belong to the mystery of his selection.

Once these attributes gather around a leader, opposition to the leader begins to feel like betrayal of the religious community itself.

A Christian may still insist that he worships God alone.

But politically and emotionally, the leader occupies a sacred position.

The Moral Reversal

The deepest problem is not that evangelical leaders discovered moral complexity.

Moral complexity is real.

A Christian voter may reasonably conclude that no candidate adequately represents Christian ethics. One politician may support policies the voter regards as morally intolerable, while another displays serious personal corruption. Political judgment requires weighing consequences, principles, probabilities, institutions, and imperfect alternatives.

The problem begins when complexity is used selectively.

Evangelical leaders demanded strict moral clarity from opponents and expansive moral flexibility for allies.

A Democratic leader's private conduct could reveal public unfitness.

Trump's conduct revealed that God uses imperfect vessels.

A political opponent's dishonesty could expose corruption.

Trump's dishonesty could reveal a fighter unwilling to accept the establishment's narrative.

A rival's aggression could demonstrate authoritarian danger.

Trump's aggression could demonstrate strength.

The standards did not disappear.

They were redistributed.

The moral law remained strict when applied outward and elastic when applied inward.

This is how partisan loyalty begins to govern theology.

The political coalition does not openly announce that it stands above Christian morality. It simply teaches believers that the same behavior has a different spiritual meaning depending upon who performs it.

Cruelty by the enemy is cruelty.

Cruelty by the chosen instrument is strength.

Falsehood by the enemy is deception.

Falsehood by the chosen instrument is strategy, exaggeration, humor, or resistance to a corrupt system.

Violence by the enemy is evil.

Violence by the chosen instrument is protection, judgment, or providence.

The act is no longer judged first.

The actor's place in the sacred story determines what the act is permitted to mean.

Why This Creates Exvangelicals

A believer may survive hypocrisy.

Religious communities have always contained people who fail to embody their teachings. Forgiveness, confession, and repentance exist partly because human conduct is inconsistent.

What becomes harder to survive is the sanctification of hypocrisy.

The believer is no longer asked merely to admit that his political ally is flawed.

He is asked to reinterpret the flaws as qualifications.

He is no longer asked merely to vote for Trump.

He is asked to see God's purpose in Trump.

He is no longer asked merely to accept an imperfect political outcome.

He is asked to treat the outcome as evidence of divine favor.

The religious crisis begins when the believer's own moral formation resists this demand.

He remembers being taught that character matters.

He remembers being taught that truth matters.

He remembers being taught that repentance is necessary.

He remembers being taught that rulers remain beneath God.

He then watches the institution suspend each of these teachings when their application threatens political power.

The contradiction becomes personal.

The believer must decide which voice represents faithfulness.

The institutional voice says:

God has chosen this man.

Do not assist his enemies.

Do not confuse political imperfection with spiritual failure.

Do not judge the instrument more harshly than the purposes God is accomplishing through him.

The conscience answers:

A providential claim does not make wrongdoing righteous.

A leader's usefulness does not make criticism unfaithful.

A prayer circle does not remove accountability.

God does not need falsehood in order to accomplish truth.

At first, the believer may remain inside the church and carry the disagreement privately.

He may avoid political conversations.

He may change congregations.

He may tell himself that the most extreme advisers do not represent evangelicalism as a whole.

In many cases, that is true. Evangelicalism remains diverse. Many evangelicals oppose Trump's conduct, Christian nationalism, the sacralization of politics, and the conversion of war into spiritual theater.

But the public identity continues to narrow.

The believer hears that Christians who oppose Trump are weak, deceived, compromised, or disloyal.

He discovers that theological orthodoxy does not compensate for political dissent.

A politically aligned person with little evident Christian formation may be welcomed as a defender of the faith.

A devoted Christian who criticizes Trump may be treated as an enemy of the church.

At that point, the person recognizes that the entrance requirements have changed.

Evangelical identity no longer means only conversion, Scripture, the cross, mission, and personal faith.

It includes unofficial political obligations.

The person does not always leave because he has rejected the original faith.

He may leave because the institution has attached something else to it.

Trump therefore creates exvangelicals not simply through scandal.

He creates them through sacralization.

His conduct exposes the contradiction.

His religious interpreters deepen it.

The believer is asked to call providence what conscience still recognizes as power.

The Question the Court Cannot Answer

Court theology can explain why the ruler should be trusted.

It has greater difficulty explaining what evidence would justify resistance.

If Trump is another Cyrus, when does Cyrus become merely a politician?

If his success proves divine selection, what would failure mean?

If prosecution proves persecution, can he ever be held accountable?

If criticism assists demonic enemies, who can correct him?

If his aggression is strength, what would cruelty look like?

If his wars serve providence, how can Christians judge whether the wars are just?

A theology that cannot answer these questions has not placed the ruler beneath God.

It has placed the ruler beyond correction.

The most important Christian question is therefore not whether God can use Donald Trump.

A theology of providence can always answer yes. God may work through rulers, opponents, institutions, accidents, failures, and events no one recognizes at the time.

The important question is whether the claim that God uses Trump has been employed to make Trump less accountable than other human beings.

The biblical doctrine of providence should humble the instrument.

Court theology exalts him.

The prophet says:

God may use you, but you remain judged.

The courtier says:

Because God uses you, your enemies must be wrong.

The distance between those statements is the distance between prophetic religion and political idolatry.

The exvangelical conscience awakens when that distance becomes impossible to ignore.

The person may still believe that God works through history.

He may still believe that political leaders can accomplish genuine goods despite serious faults.

He may still support some of Trump's policies.

What he can no longer accept is the idea that evangelical faith requires the suspension of moral judgment around one man.

The bargain has become a theology.

The theology has become a court.

And the court has made loyalty to the ruler increasingly difficult to distinguish from loyalty to God.

Chapter 2

When War Becomes Spiritual

A political war must be argued.

A sacred war only needs to be recognized.

That difference explains much of the danger surrounding evangelical interpretations of the American war with Iran.

Ordinary political argument requires evidence. Leaders must explain why force is necessary, what objectives are being pursued, what alternatives have failed, how civilians will be protected, how escalation will be contained, and what conditions would permit the conflict to end.

The arguments may still be dishonest or mistaken. Governments have manipulated intelligence, exaggerated threats, minimized civilian harm, and described open-ended wars as limited interventions. Yet the structure of ordinary political justification at least acknowledges that violence carries a burden of proof.

Sacred war weakens that burden.

Once a conflict is inserted into a cosmic story, the moral conclusion arrives before the evidence.

Iran is no longer merely a nation governed by an authoritarian regime with its own military aims, internal conflicts, civilian population, dissidents, religious communities, and competing political interests.

Iran becomes Persia.

The conflict becomes biblical.

The president becomes a providential instrument.

The enemy becomes part of the kingdom of darkness.

Military force becomes an episode in a struggle whose moral sides have already been assigned.

The believer is not invited to determine whether the war is just.

He is invited to recognize the pattern.

The Seduction of the Biblical Pattern

Biblical analogies are powerful because they compress complexity.

A contemporary conflict may involve decades of regional rivalry, nuclear policy, sanctions, proxy warfare, diplomacy, intelligence failures, domestic politics, economic interests, military planning, and competing claims of self-defense.

A biblical analogy removes much of that uncertainty.

There is a chosen side.

There is an enemy.

There is a crisis.

There is a leader raised up for the moment.

There is a test of courage.

There is a victory that serves a larger purpose.

The pattern gives emotional order to events that would otherwise remain morally ambiguous.

This is one reason political leaders value religious language. A policy defended in technical terms may still appear contingent. Citizens can dispute the intelligence, cost, legality, or strategy.

A policy placed within sacred history acquires inevitability.

If God has chosen the instrument, opposition becomes spiritually suspicious.

If the enemy belongs to a prophetic category, negotiation appears naïve.

If war has become part of divine purpose, restraint can look like disobedience.

The analogy does not merely explain the conflict.

It encloses it.

Iran Is Not Persia Without Remainder

Ancient Persia and the modern Islamic Republic of Iran are historically related, but they are not interchangeable.

The word *Persia* carries biblical associations. It can evoke Cyrus, exile, deliverance, empire, Esther, and a world in which political events are visibly connected to the destiny of Israel.

The modern Iranian state is something else: a contemporary government with institutions, factions, armed forces, religious authorities, citizens, minorities, dissidents, workers, families, and people who may oppose their own rulers.

When Iran is reduced to Persia, these distinctions disappear.

The government becomes the nation.

The nation becomes a symbol.

The symbol becomes an enemy in a sacred story.

Once the process is complete, the people who will experience the war become difficult to see.

An Iranian child is not a prophetic category.

An Iranian Christian is not a strategic abstraction.

An Iranian dissident is not responsible for the government he may already resist.

A family living near a military site is not identical to the commanders who placed the site there.

Yet sacred language tends to flatten these differences.

The whole country moves into the role assigned to it.

Political theology then commits the same error it often condemns elsewhere: collective moral identity.

The people become what their rulers are accused of being.

From Force to Judgment

The Trump administration described its objectives in Iran through language of overwhelming destruction. The official vocabulary emphasized obliteration, annihilation, and the elimination of military capability.

Such language may be intended to deter an enemy. It may communicate resolve. It may also reveal the emotional logic of the campaign: not merely restraint of danger, but domination.

Religious rhetoric adds another layer.

If a military campaign is presented as a struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, overwhelming violence can appear spiritually proportionate even when it remains politically excessive.

The enemy is not merely dangerous.

The enemy is evil.

The conflict is not merely tragic.

It is righteous.

The victory is not merely strategic.

It is providential.

This framing changes how casualties are interpreted.

In a political war, every civilian death creates a renewed demand for justification.

Was the target necessary?

Was the intelligence reliable?

Were precautions taken?

Could the attack have been delayed, altered, or abandoned?

In a sacred war, civilian deaths may still be called tragic, but tragedy no longer controls the interpretation.

The deeper story has already assigned righteousness.

The deaths are absorbed into necessity.

Compassion remains possible, but it cannot overturn the sacred conclusion.

The Disappearance of Restraint

Christian traditions have never agreed completely about war.

Some Christians have embraced pacifism or nonresistance.

Others have defended limited military force through just-war reasoning.

Still others have supported empire, revolution, nationalism, or conquest.

The diversity should prevent simplistic claims that there is one uncontested Christian political answer.

Yet serious Christian reflection on war has usually recognized one principle:

Violence demands restraint.

Just-war reasoning does not ask only whether the cause sounds righteous. It asks whether force is necessary, whether peaceful alternatives have been exhausted, whether the intention is directed toward a defensible peace, whether harm is proportionate, and whether civilians are protected.

These standards have often been ignored. But their existence matters because they deny political leaders the right to declare their own violence holy.

Court theology reverses this moral order.

It shifts attention away from the justice of the action and toward the providential status of the actor.

The question “Is this war just?” becomes secondary.

The dominant question becomes:

“Why would God have preserved and empowered this leader for this hour?”

Once Trump is accepted as a chosen instrument, his decisions acquire a presumption of sacred legitimacy.

Providence becomes circular.

Trump succeeds because God chose him.

We know God chose him because he succeeds.

His use of force must serve a larger purpose because providence placed him in power.

Opposition must therefore result from fear, weakness, partisan hatred, deception, or spiritual blindness.

The leader is no longer judged by the moral tradition.

The moral tradition is reorganized around the leader.

The Unequal Distribution of Grief

Evangelical opposition to abortion has often been expressed through intensely personal moral imagination.

The unborn child is not treated as an abstraction. The child is imagined as unique, vulnerable, known by God, and worthy of protection regardless of convenience or political cost.

A religious culture formed around this claim should possess unusual resources for recognizing the individuality of children living beneath bombs.

Yet foreign civilian deaths are frequently discussed in another vocabulary.

They become collateral damage.

They become unfortunate consequences.

They become figures in strategic calculations.

They become people whose deaths are blamed primarily upon the rulers or armed groups operating among them.

The distinction cannot be dismissed by saying that abortion and war are different moral questions. They are.

The deeper contradiction lies in the distribution of moral imagination.

One class of life is rendered individual, visible, and sacred.

Another is rendered distant, collective, threatening, and strategically regrettable.

The church does not merely reach different political conclusions.

It grieves differently.

That unequal grief teaches believers something about the actual structure of evangelical moral concern.

The proclaimed principle may be the sanctity of life.

The operative principle may be the sanctity of life as organized by partisan and national identity.

For the believer who begins to recognize this, the injury is profound.

The church had taught him how to imagine vulnerable life.

It now teaches him when not to imagine it.

Moral Injury Inside the Church

The term *moral injury* arose largely from the study of military experience. It describes the lasting psychological, relational, and spiritual consequences of participating in, witnessing, failing to prevent, or learning about acts that violate deeply held moral commitments.

It can also arise through betrayal by trusted authorities.

The phrase should not be used casually. Political disappointment is not automatically moral injury. Nor does every disagreement with a church create trauma.

But the concept helps explain what may happen when believers are asked to approve violence that their own religious formation prepared them to resist.

The government acts in the citizen's name.

The president demands loyalty.

Religious advisers provide sacred authorization.

Pastors remain silent or repeat the justification.

Fellow believers describe dissent as weakness or unbelief.

The person's conscience protests using convictions learned inside the same religious world.

The resulting conflict is not merely ideological.

It is a rupture in trust.

The believer was taught that every person bears divine significance.

He now watches civilians become strategic abstractions.

She was taught that peacemakers are blessed.

She now hears war described as spiritual courage.

He was taught that the church stands apart from worldly corruption.

He now sees the church helping the state sanctify violence.

She was taught that religious leaders speak moral truth to rulers.

She now sees religious leaders carrying the ruler's preferences back into the church and calling them biblical.

The institution does not merely fail to prevent the moral injury.

It becomes one of its sources.

Betrayal by Moral Authorities

Political leaders are expected to defend their policies. Citizens may assume that governments will present their actions in the most favorable terms possible.

Religious leaders are expected to do something else.

Their purpose is not to guarantee the innocence of the nation.

Their purpose is to remind the nation that it is not God.

This distinction makes betrayal by religious authorities especially damaging.

A believer may expect propaganda from a government.

He does not expect the church to become part of the propaganda system.

He may expect a president to claim that war is necessary.

He does not expect a pastor to claim that war belongs to the kingdom of God.

He may expect military leaders to speak of victory.

He does not expect spiritual advisers to transform victory into evidence of divine selection.

When the church supplies sacred language to state violence, the believer loses more than confidence in a policy.

He loses confidence in the interpretive authorities who taught him how to recognize right and wrong.

Scripture, prayer, preaching, prophecy, and worship—the practices through which conscience was formed—are now used against that conscience.

The church tells the believer that moral alarm is spiritual confusion.

The deeper injury lies here:

The person's own faith becomes the instrument through which the person is pressured to betray faith.

The Silence of Moderate Churches

Not every church openly blesses war.

Many pastors avoid the subject.

The silence may reflect prudence. Congregations contain members with different political views, military experiences, family histories, and moral conclusions. Worship should not become a weekly campaign event.

But silence is not always neutrality.

A church that speaks frequently about abortion, sexuality, religious liberty, national decline, immigration, Israel, and elections has already decided that public affairs can be addressed from the pulpit.

If it becomes cautious only when American bombs fall abroad, the church has not withdrawn from politics.

It has selected which political matters are permitted to receive moral judgment.

Silence also creates an interpretive vacuum.

The believer who wants Christian guidance turns elsewhere.

He finds televangelists, partisan broadcasters, prophecy teachers, presidential advisers, and online ministries willing to explain the war with certainty.

The moderate pastor's silence does not prevent sacred war.

It leaves sacred war uncontested.

This is one reason institutions can become morally implicated even when they never endorse the violence directly.

They have trained their members to seek biblical meaning in public events.

Then, at the moment of greatest danger, they surrender the task to the loudest courtiers.

The Internal Evangelical Fracture

The Iran war did not produce unanimous evangelical support.

A June 2026 Reuters/Ipsos poll found that 54 percent of evangelical respondents regarded Trump's use of military force in Iran as inconsistent with their understanding of Christianity. Forty-one percent regarded it as consistent.

The same survey found a similar moral division over immigration policy.

These findings matter because they show that evangelical conscience has not been entirely absorbed by Trumpism.

A majority of evangelicals surveyed could examine the actions of the president most closely associated with their political movement and conclude that those actions conflicted with their faith.

That judgment preserves a distinction court theology attempts to erase:

The actions of the ruler are not identical to the requirements of Christianity.

The crucial question is whether evangelical institutions can tolerate that distinction.

If believers can oppose the war, question Trump, mourn Iranian civilians, and remain recognized as faithful Christians, the conflict need not drive them out.

The church could be corrected from within.

If dissent is treated as betrayal, the institution will produce the departure it later condemns.

The believer will be told that evangelical belonging requires more than faith in Christ.

It requires loyalty to a coalition, acceptance of its enemies, and submission to its interpretation of world events.

At that point, the word *exvangelical* may describe not the person's theological conclusion but the institution's practical expulsion.

The individual may still believe that God is real.

He may still pray.

She may still read Scripture.

He may still believe that Christ reveals God.

She may still believe that repentance, truth, and mercy matter.

What the person can no longer affirm is the political obligation attached to the religious identity.

The church has changed the entrance requirements.

Providence That Cannot Fail

Sacred interpretations of war possess another advantage for those who make them:

They are almost impossible to disprove.

If Iran is weakened, Trump was chosen to defeat evil.

If the conflict expands, the forces of darkness are resisting.

If negotiations succeed, Trump becomes the providential peacemaker.

If negotiations fail, the enemy reveals its wickedness.

If American casualties rise, the nation is called to sacrifice.

If public support declines, the leader is being abandoned by the fainthearted.

Every possible outcome confirms the narrative.

A system capable of explaining everything explains nothing.

Providence becomes a label applied after events rather than a truth discerned through humility.

The believer who notices this may experience epistemic shock.

The authorities who spoke with prophetic confidence appear unable to identify any result that would prove them wrong.

Their certainty was never vulnerable to evidence.

It was not knowledge.

It was insulation.

This realization can transform a disagreement about war into a crisis of faith.

The believer no longer asks only whether the Iran policy was mistaken.

He asks whether the religious method used to justify it was ever capable of recognizing error.

That question reaches far beyond Iran.

If the same method determines what Scripture means, who God has chosen, which nation is righteous, and whose suffering matters, then the entire religious enclosure begins to weaken.

From Injury to Reconstruction

Moral injury does not produce one inevitable response.

Some believers will remain inside evangelicalism and resist the war.

Some will change churches.

Some will withdraw from political engagement.

Some will reinterpret the conflict until the contradiction becomes bearable.

Some will leave Christianity altogether.

Others will leave evangelicalism while trying to preserve faith.

For this final group, departure can become part of moral repair.

The person refuses to call violence sacred merely because religious authorities have done so.

He withdraws consent from a vocabulary that has made suffering less visible.

She begins to separate providence from political success.

He separates God from the ambitions of the United States.

She separates Christianity from the president's coalition.

The reconstruction may involve returning to biblical texts the political system neglected.

The prophets are reread not merely as predictors of modern geopolitics but as accusers of rulers who combine worship with injustice.

The Sermon on the Mount is reread not as an impossible private ethic but as a judgment upon the Christian desire to dominate.

The crucifixion is reread not as a symbol of presidential persecution but as God's identification with a victim of political and religious power.

This reconstruction does not require the conclusion that every use of military force is forbidden.

It requires a more elementary confession:

No president’s violence becomes holy merely because Christian leaders stand around him and pray.

Looking Up at Iran

The Iran war creates exvangelicals through a sequence of recognition.

The believer sees violence.

The believer hears it sanctified.

The believer experiences resistance from within the Christian conscience.

The believer discovers that the institution sides with the sanctification rather than the resistance.

Finally, the believer concludes that remaining inside the institution would require a deeper departure—from compassion, truth, moral responsibility, and perhaps from God.

The church may call the person fallen away.

The person may understand the departure differently.

He looked up from the biblical pattern.

He saw a country rather than Persia.

He saw civilians rather than an enemy population.

He saw a political decision rather than an inevitable prophecy.

He saw that spiritual advisers had transformed presidential power into sacred authority.

He saw that the voice demanding loyalty was not necessarily the voice of God.

The war remained politically complex.

The moral questions remained difficult.

But the sacred enclosure had broken.

The person could no longer believe that uncertainty was a failure of faith.

He could no longer believe that caution was surrender to evil.

He could no longer believe that the kingdom of God advanced through whatever violence the chosen leader declared necessary.

The war had been presented as spiritual.

For the believer who resisted that presentation, the spiritual act was refusal.

Chapter 3

The Sacred Map and the Palestinian

Gaza presents evangelical Christianity with a question more fundamental than foreign policy.

Can a theology recognize a human being whose existence complicates the theology?

For many American evangelicals, the modern State of Israel is not merely a country. It occupies a place within a sacred history extending from Abraham through the biblical kingdoms, exile, restoration, prophecy, and the anticipated end of the age.

This gives Israel a meaning no other modern state possesses.

France may be judged as France.

Iran may be judged as Iran.

The United States may be called blessed or providential, but its borders are not ordinarily treated as the direct fulfillment of a divine land grant made thousands of years ago.

Israel is different.

For many Christian Zionists, modern Israeli sovereignty is not simply the outcome of modern history, Jewish national aspiration, international diplomacy, war, migration, trauma, and political organization. It is the recovery of land promised by God.

Political support therefore becomes theological obedience.

To stand with Israel is to stand with Scripture.

To question Israel is to risk questioning the promise.

To challenge territorial claims is to risk challenging God.

This fusion creates an extraordinary moral problem.

Once a government has been placed inside a sacred role, its conduct becomes difficult to judge in ordinary terms.

A government can make mistakes.

A covenant cannot.

A military can use excessive force.

A prophecy cannot.

A political leader can manipulate Scripture.

God cannot.

The closer the modern state is identified with biblical Israel, the more criticism of political action begins to resemble hostility toward the divine purpose.

The distinction between a people, a government, and a theological symbol begins to disappear.

The Many Meanings of Israel

The word *Israel* carries several meanings.

It can name Jacob.

It can name the descendants associated with him.

It can name an ancient people.

It can name a covenant community.

It can name kingdoms described in Scripture.

It can name the Jewish people across later history.

It can name the modern State of Israel established in 1948.

It can name a symbol within Christian theology.

These meanings are related, but they are not interchangeable.

A biblical passage concerning ancient Israel does not automatically determine the policies, borders, military conduct, constitutional structure, or moral standing of a modern nation-state.

Modern Israel has elected leaders, political parties, courts, military institutions, economic interests, social divisions, religious disagreements, and citizens who argue intensely among themselves.

It acts through human agents.

Those agents make decisions.

Those decisions produce consequences.

The modern state is therefore subject to the same elementary moral principle that applies to every government:

Its conduct must be judged.

A government does not become incapable of wrongdoing because it carries an ancient name.

A state does not become a covenant because its citizens possess a profound historic relationship to the land.

A military operation does not become divine judgment because a political leader invokes a biblical enemy.

A settlement does not become morally uncontestable because a verse can be placed beside it.

To collapse these distinctions is to grant a modern government something no government should possess:

immunity from ordinary moral evaluation.

The Israel Exception

Evangelical political ethics often contain an exception for Israel.

Other governments may be judged by conduct.

Israel may be judged by identity.

Other leaders may be evaluated according to law, policy, motive, and consequence.

Israeli leaders may be defended through covenant, prophecy, election, and sacred history.

Other territorial conflicts may require negotiation among competing rights and histories.

Israeli territorial claims may be treated as having already been decided by God.

This does not mean every evangelical supporter of Israel believes exactly the same thing.

Some support Israel because of Jewish historical vulnerability.

Some emphasize the Holocaust and the necessity of Jewish refuge.

Some regard Israel as a strategic democratic ally.

Some fear Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, or other forces that have threatened Israeli civilians.

Some believe Jewish national self-determination deserves protection in a world where antisemitism remains persistent and dangerous.

These concerns cannot be dismissed as mere religious fantasy.

Jewish vulnerability is real.

The October 7 attacks demonstrated that Israeli civilians face genuine threats.

Hamas killed and abducted civilians.

Antisemitism has intensified in many parts of the world.

Any account of Gaza that treats Israeli fear as invented or morally irrelevant will become as distorted as the Christian Zionism it criticizes.

The problem examined here is narrower.

It begins when legitimate concern for Jewish life becomes unconditional theological allegiance to state power.

It begins when the government is no longer judged primarily by what it does but by the role Christians have assigned to it.

It begins when support for Israel becomes a test of biblical faithfulness.

The Sacred Title Deed

Christian Zionism often treats biblical land promises as continuing title deeds.

The logic is direct.

God gave the land to Abraham and his descendants.

God's promise is eternal.

The Jewish people retain the right to the land.

Modern Jewish sovereignty therefore fulfills the promise.

Any political arrangement that restricts that sovereignty risks opposing God.

The apparent simplicity of this reasoning conceals several difficult questions.

Which biblical boundaries apply?

Which descendants inherit?

How are ancient promises translated into modern international law?

What political rights belong to people who have lived on the land for generations but are not included within the preferred covenantal interpretation?

What happens when one people's sacred history occupies the same geography as another people's home?

A theology that treats the land grant as self-executing does not need to answer these questions fully.

The sacred claim has already outranked the empirical one.

The Palestinian family says:

We live here.

Our parents lived here.

Our grandparents lived here.

Our dead are buried here.

Our church, mosque, orchard, school, or village stood here.

The theological answer says:

But the land was promised.

The Palestinian enters the discussion at a permanent disadvantage.

His evidence is historical, personal, legal, embodied, and present.

The claim made against him is divine.

He can describe what happened to his family.

He cannot renegotiate God.

The Living Population

A map appears empty until someone places people upon it.

Political and prophetic maps often encourage the viewer to think in colors, borders, corridors, settlements, strategic zones, and territorial continuity.

Human beings become demographic facts.

A Palestinian village can appear as an obstacle to Israeli security.

An Israeli settlement can appear as an obstacle to Palestinian statehood.

Gaza can appear as a problem to be contained.

The West Bank can appear as disputed terrain.

The map creates distance.

The person restores moral difficulty.

A Palestinian is not merely a member of a population.

He has a name.

She has a family.

He remembers a home.

She fears for a child.

He may be Muslim, Christian, secular, conservative, progressive, wealthy, poor, politically engaged, or exhausted by politics.

She may oppose Hamas.

He may support it.

She may have no meaningful political power at all.

The category *Palestinian* does not eliminate individuality.

Neither does the category *Israeli*.

An Israeli is not merely a settler, soldier, Zionist, colonizer, hostage, victim, or representative of a government.

He may fear another attack.

She may oppose the government.

He may have lost family on October 7.

She may work for peace.

He may support policies others regard as unjust.

She may be trapped within a national trauma that makes every concession appear dangerous.

Human beings exceed the political categories used to explain them.

A moral theology must preserve that excess.

The Theological Disappearance

The Palestinian does not need to be openly hated in order to disappear from evangelical thought.

He needs only to be made narratively unnecessary.

The central sacred story can proceed without him.

God promises the land.

The Jewish people return.

Israel is restored.

Hostile nations gather.

Conflict intensifies.

Prophecy is fulfilled.

Christ returns.

Within this sequence, what stable role does the Palestinian possess?

He may appear as an obstacle.

He may appear as an enemy.

He may appear as an object of conversion or humanitarian concern.

He may appear as evidence of regional hostility.

What he rarely appears as is a person whose political existence possesses its own enduring theological significance.

The narrative does not necessarily require his death.

It requires that his claims never become strong enough to alter the sacred sequence.

This is theological disappearance.

The person remains physically present but morally secondary.

His suffering can be acknowledged without becoming authoritative.

His testimony can be heard without being believed.

His rights can be discussed without being allowed to compete with prophecy.

The theology does not deny that Palestinians exist.

It denies them the power to change the story.

Gaza as Material Reality

Gaza makes theological disappearance harder.

The scale of destruction forces the abstract story into contact with bodies, ruins, hunger, displacement, grief, and prolonged human vulnerability.

Gaza is not merely Hamas.

It is not merely a battlefield.

It is not merely a security threat, prophetic sign, diplomatic problem, or disputed legal case.

It is a place where human beings live.

They require water, food, shelter, medical care, sanitation, schools, family, work, privacy, movement, and hope.

When those structures collapse, life does not become a theological argument.

It becomes survival.

The ruins create a test for every interpretation.

If destroyed neighborhoods do not alter the theology, what would?

If dead children do not alter it, what would?

If churches, mosques, hospitals, homes, schools, and infrastructure are damaged or destroyed, what evidence could become morally disruptive?

If repeated displacement does not alter the believer's allegiance, what fact on the ground could?

A theology that can absorb any amount of suffering without reconsidering its political conclusion has become nearly impossible to falsify.

The human cost becomes visible but powerless.

The believer may grieve.

The believer may donate humanitarian aid.

The believer may pray for peace.

Yet the governing narrative remains untouched.

The suffering becomes a tragic detail inside a righteous process.

This is how compassion can coexist with ideological blindness.

The individual feels sorrow.

The theology refuses correction.

Amalek

The danger of biblical analogy became especially visible when Benjamin Netanyahu invoked the memory of Amalek during the Gaza war.

The reference carried enormous theological weight.

Amalek is not merely a historical enemy within the biblical tradition. The name became associated with enduring and total enmity.

To invoke Amalek is to invoke more than danger.

It places the adversary within a category of sacred opposition.

The Israeli government later argued that the reference was directed toward Hamas rather than Palestinians as a whole.

That distinction should be preserved.

Hamas is not identical to Gaza.

Hamas is not identical to the Palestinian people.

Yet the analogy remains dangerous precisely because modern warfare does not occur inside clean symbolic boundaries.

Gaza contains fighters and civilians within the same confined territory.

When a political leader invokes an ancient enemy associated with total judgment, the distinction between combatant, civilian, ethnicity, territory, and inherited guilt can begin to blur.

The term gathers contemporary people into a sacred category that precedes individual responsibility.

The enemy is no longer merely someone who committed or planned an act.

The enemy belongs to a transhistorical identity.

Christian audiences trained to interpret modern events through biblical patterns may hear the reference with even greater force than secular audiences.

The analogy confirms the structure they already possess.

Israel is biblical Israel.

Its enemy is a biblical enemy.

The war is therefore not merely military.

It participates in sacred history.

The danger is not that every listener consciously desires destruction.

The danger is that the analogy makes restraint more difficult to imagine as faithfulness.

The Hebrew Bible Is Not the Problem

The Hebrew Bible should not be reduced to conquest narratives.

It contains law, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, lament, history, memory, trauma, moral argument, and competing theological voices.

It contains commands that disturb modern readers.

It also contains relentless criticism of rulers, priests, nations, violence, exploitation, false worship, and national self-deception.

The prophets do not teach that Israel's election makes Israel incapable of injustice.

They teach the opposite.

Election intensifies responsibility.

Covenant does not eliminate judgment.

Possession of land does not excuse oppression.

Religious observance does not compensate for cruelty.

The widow, orphan, stranger, poor, and displaced person repeatedly become tests of national righteousness.

The misuse of the Hebrew Bible therefore depends upon selectivity.

Texts of possession are treated as permanent.

Texts of judgment are redirected toward enemies.

Texts of conquest are treated as politically suggestive.

Texts of mercy are spiritualized.

Texts concerning ancient adversaries are made contemporary.

Texts condemning the chosen community are treated as belonging safely to the past.

The Bible is not read too literally.

It is read strategically.

Literal where it authorizes possession.

Contextual where it restrains power.

Permanent where it supports the favored government.

Historical where it threatens the favored government.

The method reveals its political purpose through its asymmetry.

The Palestinian Christian

Palestinian Christians create a special crisis for American evangelical theology.

They cannot easily be dismissed as outsiders to Christianity.

Their communities possess deep roots in the land.

They worship within the geography American Christians call holy.

They read the Bible.

They confess Christ.

They celebrate the sacraments.

They pray in churches older than many Western denominations.

Yet their testimony often carries less authority in American evangelical settings than the testimony of prophecy teachers, political advocates, tour leaders, or Israeli officials.

This creates an extraordinary hierarchy.

The Palestinian Christian lives the consequences.

The American Christian explains what the consequences mean.

The person on the ground supplies experience.

The outsider supplies theology.

The Palestinian Christian may describe occupation, displacement, bombardment, restriction, fear, or loss.

The American interpreter may respond that the events must be understood within the larger biblical plan.

The living Christian becomes secondary to the prophecy system of another Christian.

This is more than disagreement.

It is theological possession.

The outsider claims the authority to define the spiritual meaning of another community's suffering.

The Palestinian Christian is allowed to testify only if the testimony does not disturb the sacred map.

Christian Zionism and Jewish Agency

Christian Zionism is often presented as the opposite of antisemitism.

In many contexts, it has encouraged Christians to support Jewish safety, oppose anti-Jewish hatred, and reject older theological traditions that treated Jewish survival as evidence of divine rejection.

These are meaningful developments.

Yet Christian Zionism can also instrumentalize Jews.

The Jewish people are loved because they occupy a necessary role inside a Christian eschatology.

Their return to the land confirms prophecy.

Their state becomes evidence of biblical truth.

Their political decisions are interpreted as movement toward an end Christians believe they understand.

Their ultimate theological destiny may include conversion within a Christian account of the end times.

This is not the same as respecting Jewish agency.

A person may declare intense love for Israel while still claiming the right to explain what Jewish history ultimately means to God.

The Jewish people become actors in a Christian drama whose conclusion has already been written by Christians.

Palestinians are marginalized because they complicate the scenario.

Jews themselves are enclosed within it.

Christian Zionism can therefore love a theological Israel more intensely than it listens to actual Jewish disagreement.

Israeli citizens disagree about war, government, settlements, security, hostages, borders, religion, and Palestinian rights.

American Jewish communities also disagree.

A theology that treats one Israeli government as the transparent expression of Jewish destiny erases this plurality.

It does not merely ignore Palestinians.

It can also ignore Jews who refuse the role assigned to them.

Antisemitism and Moral Evasion

Any serious criticism of Israel must confront antisemitism directly.

Antisemitism does not disappear because the critic believes he is defending Palestinians.

It can enter through collective blame, conspiracy, demonization, historical denial, unequal standards, or the assumption that every Jewish person bears responsibility for an Israeli government.

It can appear in political language that treats Jews as uniquely manipulative, disloyal, powerful, or responsible for global conflict.

It can appear in celebrations of violence against Israeli civilians.

It can appear in the denial that Jewish people possess a genuine historical and emotional connection to the land.

Nothing in the critique of Christian Zionism requires these beliefs.

Jewish life must be protected.

Jewish fear must be heard.

Jewish history cannot be erased.

The October 7 attacks cannot be treated as a justified abstraction.

Israeli civilians do not become legitimate targets because Palestinians have suffered.

These truths remain.

Another set of truths remains with them.

Palestinians are not collectively responsible for Hamas.

Palestinian civilians do not become expendable because Israel faces real threats.

Jewish historical suffering does not provide unlimited moral authorization to a modern government.

Biblical connection does not erase the rights of people living on the land.

Criticism of a government is not automatically hatred of a people.

A morally serious theology must hold both sets of truths at once.

Failure in either direction produces dehumanization.

The Genocide Question

The word *genocide* carries legal, historical, and moral gravity.

It should not be used carelessly.

It should not be made unspeakable merely because it concerns an allied government.

The International Court of Justice had not issued a final judgment on whether Israel committed genocide in Gaza when this book was completed.

Israel rejects the accusation and argues that it has conducted a lawful war against Hamas following the October 7 attacks.

These facts matter.

A responsible account should not present a final legal judgment that has not occurred.

But legal uncertainty does not suspend moral judgment.

Christians do not need to wait for the last filing of an international court before recognizing destruction, hunger, displacement, civilian death, and rhetoric of collective enmity.

The strongest legal term may remain contested while the material reality remains visible.

One can dispute whether genocide has been legally established and still conclude that Gaza has endured catastrophic destruction.

One can condemn Hamas and still refuse collective punishment.

One can affirm Israel's right to protect its population and still deny that self-defense has no moral limits.

One can oppose antisemitism and still condemn Israeli state policy.

One can recognize Jewish historical connection to the land and still recognize Palestinian political and human rights.

These are not contradictions.

They are the minimum conditions of moral adulthood.

Theology becomes evasive when uncertainty about the strongest term is used to prevent discussion of everything beneath it.

Prophecy and Catastrophe

Apocalyptic theology can produce a disturbing relationship with catastrophe.

If war has been predicted, war confirms the interpretation.

If nations gather against Israel, prophecy appears to advance.

If violence intensifies, the end appears nearer.

The believer may sincerely grieve the suffering while retaining an unconscious investment in the sequence producing it.

The worse events become, the more meaningful they appear.

This is the moral danger of prophecy without restraint.

Catastrophe can become evidence that the theology is working.

Peacemaking may appear spiritually naïve.

Political compromise may appear contrary to divine intention.

Territorial expansion may appear inevitable.

Human suffering becomes a sign of approaching redemption.

The theology does not need to desire dead Palestinians consciously.

It needs only to desire a prophetic future in which Palestinian political existence has no stable place.

The disappearance occurs in stages.

First, Palestinians disappear from the sacred story.

Then their rights disappear from political imagination.

Then their suffering disappears from the sermon.

Finally, their physical removal can be discussed as realistic, necessary, or even humane.

The path from theological exclusion to political displacement is not automatic.

But it is morally intelligible.

People made narratively unnecessary are easier to remove.

The Moment of Recognition

For some evangelicals, Gaza breaks the enclosure.

The images accumulate.

The testimonies accumulate.

The casualty reports, ruins, displaced families, damaged churches, grieving parents, and Palestinian Christian voices become too numerous to absorb as secondary details.

The inherited interpretation begins to fail.

The believer experiences a reversal.

What had been called biblical fidelity begins to appear as avoidance.

What had been called standing with Israel begins to appear as standing with a government regardless of conduct.

What had been called prophecy begins to appear as political prediction protected from correction.

What had been called opposition to antisemitism begins, in some contexts, to appear as a means of silencing Palestinian suffering.

What had been called Christian love begins to appear radically unequal in its distribution.

The believer does not necessarily become hostile to Israel.

He becomes capable of separating Israel from its government.

She becomes capable of seeing Jewish history and Palestinian history at the same time.

He can condemn Hamas without treating Gaza as Hamas.

She can defend Jewish safety without granting biblical immunity to state power.

The sacred map loses its monopoly.

The living population reappears.

The Neighbor Beside the Road

Christian Zionism often asks who possesses the land.

Governments ask who controls it.

Military planners ask how it can be secured.

Archaeologists ask who occupied it in antiquity.

Diplomats ask how it might be divided.

Prophecy teachers ask what must happen there next.

The Gospel asks another question:

Who lies wounded beside the road?

That question disrupts every closed map.

It gives moral priority to the person encountered before the theological argument has been completed.

The neighbor is not a conclusion reached after prophecy has assigned every role.

The neighbor interrupts the prophecy.

The neighbor's existence changes what faithfulness requires.

The Palestinian is not first an obstacle, enemy, demographic problem, or inhabitant of disputed territory.

He is a person.

The Israeli is not first an occupier, colonizer, soldier, Zionist, or symbol of prophecy.

She is a person.

Recognition does not eliminate political responsibility.

It makes political responsibility possible.

Governments can still be judged.

Armed groups can still be condemned.

Historical claims can still be evaluated.

Security threats can still be taken seriously.

But no judgment is permitted to erase the human being beneath it.

Looking Up

The central failure of Christian Zionism is not that it reads the Bible.

It is that it can read the Bible without allowing the neighbor to interrupt.

The text becomes more real than the body.

The ancient claim becomes more real than the living home.

The prophecy becomes more real than the child.

The sacred map becomes more real than the people upon it.

Gaza creates exvangelicals when believers can no longer maintain that hierarchy.

They look up.

They see an Israeli mother who fears another attack.

They see a Palestinian father searching through rubble.

They see Jewish history without denying Palestinian history.

They see Palestinian suffering without becoming indifferent to antisemitism.

They see that no ancient name removes a modern government from moral judgment.

They see that a biblical analogy cannot absolve human agents of responsibility.

They see that a land can be sacred without making one population disposable.

They may continue to read Scripture.

They may continue to believe in God.

What they can no longer accept is a theology that requires blindness as proof of faith.

The Palestinian had not been absent.

The theology had trained the believer not to see him.

The exvangelical moment begins when the person becomes visible again.

Chapter 4

The Bible Never Arrives Alone

“The Bible plainly says.”

Few sentences possess greater authority inside evangelical Christianity.

The phrase appears to remove the speaker from the argument. The pastor, parent, teacher, or believer is not offering a personal opinion. He is not imposing a tradition. She is not advancing an ideology. They are simply reporting what Scripture says.

The apparent modesty of the statement is part of its power.

“I believe” can be questioned.

“My church teaches” can be compared with what other churches teach.

“My interpretation is” openly acknowledges human judgment.

“The Bible plainly says” presents no human authority to examine.

The interpretation disappears.

Only God remains.

This is how a fallible reader can speak with infallible force without claiming personal infallibility.

The believer does not say:

“I cannot be wrong.”

He says:

“God cannot be wrong.”

The missing question is whether the believer has understood God correctly.

The Promise of Sola Scriptura

Sola Scriptura emerged as a protest against religious authority that had placed itself beyond correction.

Scripture would stand above popes, councils, traditions, rulers, theologians, and institutions. No human office could claim immunity from the Word of God. The church itself remained subject to judgment.

This principle contains a powerful anti-authoritarian possibility.

A ruler may invoke divine favor, but Scripture can expose injustice.

A church may defend its reputation, but Scripture can condemn hypocrisy.

A religious leader may demand obedience, but Scripture can place conscience beneath a higher authority.

A nation may call itself chosen, but the prophets can remind chosen peoples that election intensifies responsibility rather than eliminating it.

Properly understood, *Sola Scriptura* should make Christians suspicious of court theology.

It should prevent a president, party, government, or nation from claiming possession of God.

Yet the principle can be transformed into its opposite.

Instead of placing institutions beneath Scripture, it can allow institutions to speak through Scripture while denying that they are speaking.

The believer is told that the Bible alone governs faith.

But the Bible is interpreted through pastors, teachers, denominations, seminaries, publishers, study notes, prophecy charts, political organizations, media networks, family traditions, and communities of trust.

These authorities do not disappear because the believer denies having them.

They become harder to see.

The hidden authority is often more powerful than the acknowledged one.

Scripture Alone Is Not Interpretation Alone

Classical Protestant theology does not require the belief that an isolated individual can open the Bible and recover the whole Christian faith without language, history, community, scholarship, or tradition.

Other forms of authority may remain subordinate to Scripture.

Teachers can teach.

Creeds can summarize.

Scholars can investigate language and history.

Communities can preserve memory.

Pastors can guide.

Traditions can transmit insight.

The central claim is not that these human authorities are useless. It is that none possesses the final and infallible authority attributed to Scripture.

The difficulty appears when this careful distinction collapses.

The Bible may be regarded as infallible.

The reader is not.

The text may be inspired.

The application remains human.

The doctrine may claim certainty.

The political conclusion still requires interpretation.

Closed biblicism transfers the certainty attributed to Scripture onto the interpretation while continuing to deny that the transfer occurred.

The sequence often looks like this:

Scripture is true.

My doctrine comes from Scripture.

My political conclusion follows from the doctrine.

Therefore, opposition to my political conclusion is opposition to biblical truth.

Human reasoning has occurred at every stage.

By the final stage, the reasoning has vanished.

The conclusion stands clothed in divine authority.

The Bible Never Arrives Alone

No reader encounters the Bible without mediation.

The reader encounters a canon—a collection of writings whose boundaries were recognized, debated, transmitted, and preserved through historical communities.

The reader encounters a translation produced through judgments about vocabulary, grammar, textual variants, style, and meaning.

The reader encounters chapter divisions, verse numbers, punctuation, headings, paragraph breaks, maps, cross-references, introductions, footnotes, and formatting decisions.

The reader encounters a physical or digital object whose design already suggests how its parts belong together.

The reader also arrives with a history.

A child taught that Revelation explains current politics reads differently from a child taught that Revelation encouraged persecuted churches under empire.

A person raised in a dispensational congregation sees Israel differently from a person raised in a peace church.

A reader taught that America is a Christian nation encounters biblical kingship differently from a Christian whose ancestors experienced American power as slavery, segregation, removal, internment, or exclusion.

The words on the page may be identical.

The world entering the act of reading is not.

This does not mean that interpretation is arbitrary or that a text can mean anything.

Language constrains interpretation.

History constrains it.

Genre constrains it.

Context constrains it.

The rest of the canon constrains it.

Evidence constrains it.

But none of these constraints interprets itself.

A reader must decide which context matters most, which texts illuminate others, what a command addressed to an ancient people means in a different society, and how narrative, law, poetry, prophecy, and apocalypse should shape present action.

The Bible never arrives alone because the reader never arrives alone.

The Invisible Tradition

Evangelicals often criticize traditions that openly acknowledge themselves.

Catholics speak of church teaching and tradition.

Orthodox Christians locate Scripture within the worship and interpretation of the church.

Historical-critical scholars state methods and assumptions.

A closed biblicist may claim to rely upon none of these.

He simply believes the Bible.

But the absence of an acknowledged tradition does not mean the absence of tradition.

It may mean the tradition has become invisible.

A believer may inherit assumptions about the end times, gender, sexuality, war, capitalism, race, Israel, government, or national identity without ever being told that these assumptions possess histories.

They are presented as what Christians have always believed.

Alternative Christian interpretations then appear not as competing traditions but as departures from the Bible.

The believer may know that Catholics possess tradition.

He may not know that his study Bible does too.

He may recognize that a Palestinian Christian reads from a political location.

He may not recognize the political location of an American suburban church.

He may regard Black theology, feminist theology, liberation theology, or peace theology as contextual.

He may regard white conservative evangelicalism as context-free Christianity.

Culture is something other people have.

Tradition is something other churches follow.

Ideology is something political opponents impose.

Interpretation is something liberals do to avoid the plain meaning.

The community's own reading appears as the absence of all these influences.

That appearance gives the reading extraordinary authority.

An acknowledged tradition can be examined.

An invisible tradition speaks as God.

The Interpretive Supply Chain

The believer holding an open Bible may stand at the end of a long interpretive supply chain.

A translation committee selected words.

An editor supplied headings.

A publisher chose supplementary material.

A study-Bible author connected passages.

A seminary trained the pastor.

A pastor framed the question.

A prophecy teacher identified the modern nation.

A political organization named the threat.

A broadcaster supplied the emotional tone.

A social-media network repeated the conclusion.

A trusted family member confirmed it.

Then the believer opens the Bible and recognizes the meaning as obvious.

This process does not require conspiracy.

Most participants may be sincere.

The translator believes the chosen wording is best.

The editor believes the heading helps.

The pastor believes the sermon is faithful.

The prophecy teacher believes current events truly fulfill Scripture.

The political activist believes the campaign protects Christianity.

The parent believes the child is being taught divine truth.

The structural effect remains.

A conclusion produced through many human judgments is experienced as direct contact with the text.

The believer says:

“The Bible tells me.”

A more complete statement might be:

“A trusted interpretive network taught me how to recognize one possible meaning as the only faithful meaning.”

The Power of Headings

Even a heading can govern theology.

A biblical manuscript did not originally arrive with modern section titles printed above each passage. Those titles are editorial aids.

They can help readers navigate.

They can also decide what the reader thinks the passage is about before the passage begins.

A heading such as “The Restoration of Israel” places a text inside one interpretive framework.

A heading such as “Hope After Exile” places it inside another.

A heading such as “Signs of the End Times” encourages the reader to look for predictions.

A heading such as “Comfort for a Persecuted Church” directs attention toward another historical and theological concern.

The words below the heading may remain unchanged.

The heading teaches the reader what to see.

The same principle applies to maps and timelines.

A prophecy chart can join passages written in different historical settings into a single sequence. Once the sequence is visible, the reader experiences it as something discovered in Scripture rather than constructed by the chart maker.

Modern Israel enters the diagram.

Iran enters under Persia.

Russia may enter under Gog.

A conflict becomes a stage.

A political leader becomes an instrument.

The visual arrangement creates certainty before the textual argument has been examined.

The chart does not merely illustrate belief.

It manufactures the experience of inevitability.

Pervasive Disagreement

The clearest challenge to claims of interpretive obviousness is the history of Christian disagreement.

Christians who affirm the Bible's authority disagree about baptism, communion, predestination, free will, spiritual gifts, women in ministry, divorce, remarriage, creation, evolution, sexuality, capital punishment, war, poverty, immigration, church government, Israel, and the end times.

They do not disagree only because one side loves Scripture and the other rejects it.

Many conflicting positions are defended by sincere, educated, prayerful believers who affirm similar doctrines of inspiration.

A Baptist may regard believer's baptism as plain.

A Presbyterian may regard infant baptism as biblically warranted.

A Pentecostal may see continuing spiritual gifts throughout the New Testament.

A cessationist may regard some gifts as limited to the apostolic era.

A pacifist may see enemy-love as decisive.

A just-war Christian may see governmental force as compatible with Christian discipleship.

A dispensationalist may see modern Israel at the center of prophecy.

Another evangelical may reject that entire system while affirming the same biblical canon.

Each side can claim that the other has allowed culture or tradition to distort Scripture.

The accusation does not decide the dispute.

Every side can make it.

The reality of disagreement does not prove that truth is unavailable.

It proves that access to truth is mediated by fallible interpretation.

This should produce humility.

Closed biblicism often produces greater certainty instead.

The community explains disagreement by assuming that faithful readers would agree if they were not compromised.

Alternative interpretations become evidence of rebellion, cultural accommodation, weak faith, or inadequate submission to Scripture.

The possibility that the community itself is mistaken remains theoretically admitted and practically unavailable.

The Plain Meaning and Political Change

The plain meaning of Scripture often changes when political alliances change.

This does not mean every theological development is cynical.

People learn.

Historical knowledge grows.

Moral experience exposes neglected consequences.

Previously unheard communities speak.

Texts are reread.

Traditions can be corrected.

But a pattern becomes suspicious when interpretations change in the direction required by political power while continuing to be described as timeless biblical truth.

Character provides one example.

Before Trump, evangelical leaders often argued that private conduct revealed public trustworthiness.

Under Trump, personal immorality became compatible with providential usefulness.

The Bible did not change.

The political need changed.

Immigration provides another example.

Scripture contains repeated concern for the stranger, foreigner, exile, and vulnerable traveler.

These themes have supported generous approaches to refugees and immigrants.

As immigration became more intensely polarized, evangelical interpretation often shifted toward borders, law, national order, criminality, and threat.

These concerns are not illegitimate. Governments have responsibilities involving borders and law.

The interpretive imbalance is revealing.

Texts supporting restriction become politically concrete.

Texts supporting hospitality become private virtues, general sentiments, or commands addressed to a different historical community.

Israel provides an even clearer example.

Ancient land promises are treated as directly relevant to modern political territory.

Prophetic condemnations of national injustice are treated as general spiritual lessons.

Conquest can become geopolitically suggestive.

Mercy becomes devotional.

Election remains literal.

Judgment becomes metaphorical.

Iran follows the same pattern.

Persia becomes politically literal when useful for interpreting war.

Love of enemies becomes an ideal for private relationships.

The interpretive method is not consistent literalism.

It is strategic literalism.

Literal where the text authorizes power.

Contextual where the text restrains power.

Permanent where it favors the coalition.

Historically limited where it threatens the coalition.

Inerrancy and the Transfer of Perfection

Biblical inerrancy is commonly defined with qualifications.

Scripture is without error in what it affirms when properly understood according to its language, genre, intention, and context.

The qualification “when properly understood” protects an essential distinction.

The text may be inerrant.

The reader remains fallible.

Closed biblicism loses that distinction in practice.

The believer may verbally acknowledge fallibility while treating disagreement with a favored interpretation as rejection of the Bible.

This occurs because institutions cannot act upon an uninterpreted text.

A church must teach.

A denomination must define boundaries.

A school must establish standards.

A political ministry must recommend action.

Every decision requires interpretation.

If the interpretation remains visibly provisional, the institution must tolerate more uncertainty and disagreement.

Institutions often prefer confidence.

The certainty attributed to Scripture is therefore transferred to the application.

Scripture is without error.

This doctrine is scriptural.

This policy follows from the doctrine.

Therefore, the policy possesses biblical authority.

A claim about the perfection of Scripture becomes a claim about the correctness of a human political judgment.

The Bible does not mention Trump.

It does not describe the modern United States.

It does not provide an explicit policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran.

It does not contain the current borders or institutions of the modern State of Israel.

The interpretive network completes the circuit.

By the time the conclusion reaches the believer, the human work has disappeared.

The Self-Sealing System

A closed interpretive system must control not only Scripture but evidence.

If events repeatedly contradict the believer's moral expectations, either the interpretation must change or the events must be redescribed.

Changing the interpretation can be spiritually frightening.

If the disputed doctrine has been fused with biblical authority, admitting error may appear to threaten the entire structure.

If the prophecy teacher was wrong, what else might be wrong?

If modern Israel is not identical to biblical Israel, what happens to the end-times system?

If Trump was not chosen in the way leaders claimed, what happens to the prophetic messages, prayer gatherings, and political sacrifices made for him?

If the war was unjust, what happens to the pastors who called it spiritual?

The cost of revision appears enormous.

Reality becomes easier to sacrifice.

News reports can be dismissed as propaganda.

Photographs can be declared staged or decontextualized.

Casualty estimates can be treated as enemy inventions.

International organizations can be described as hostile to Christianity or Israel.

Scholars can be dismissed as secular.

Palestinian Christians can be dismissed as politically compromised.

Jewish critics of an Israeli government can be treated as unrepresentative.

Former evangelicals can be accused of wanting permission to sin.

Every challenge is classified according to the system's existing categories.

If outsiders agree, the interpretation is obvious.

If outsiders disagree, persecution has been predicted.

If evidence supports the claim, Scripture is vindicated.

If evidence contradicts the claim, Satan is attacking biblical truth.

The system cannot lose because every loss has already been translated into victory.

Spiritual Warfare as Epistemology

Spiritual warfare is not only a belief about invisible conflict.

It can become a method of knowing.

The world is divided into sources aligned with God and sources aligned with deception.

Trusted Christian leaders become reliable not because each claim has been tested but because they occupy the faithful side.

Journalists, academics, international bodies, courts, political opponents, and religious dissenters become unreliable because they occupy a compromised side.

Evidence is judged partly by the identity of the source.

A claim from inside the trusted network arrives with spiritual credibility.

A claim from outside arrives under suspicion.

This is understandable at one level. Every person relies upon trust. No individual can independently verify every fact.

The danger begins when the trust network becomes immune to correction from outside itself.

The believer is not merely warned that some sources may be biased.

He is taught that contrary sources participate in a spiritual attack.

The act of checking the claim can itself feel disloyal.

Doubt becomes vulnerability to deception.

Curiosity becomes compromise.

Moral discomfort becomes evidence that the world has influenced the conscience.

This creates a closed epistemic community.

The institution does not need to ban information physically.

It teaches believers which information cannot be spiritually safe.

The Truth on the Ground

The central sentence of this book can now be stated more precisely:

The truth on the ground becomes too ugly to look up from the Bible because the interpretation has already determined what the ground is permitted to mean.

A dead Palestinian child is real.

But the covenant is treated as more real.

An Iranian family beneath bombardment is real.

But spiritual warfare is treated as more real.

Trump's dishonesty is real.

But providential selection is treated as more real.

The suffering is acknowledged as an event and denied as judgment.

It happened.

But it does not mean what an unprotected conscience might think it means.

The theological system does not always ask the believer to deny the visible fact.

It asks the believer to deny the fact's authority.

The child died, but the death cannot change the prophecy.

The leader lied, but the lie cannot change the providential role.

The war expanded, but the expansion cannot disprove divine purpose.

The suffering is permitted to exist only after it has been deprived of the power to correct belief.

This is how personally compassionate people can participate in a cruel political theology.

They may grieve sincerely.

They inhabit a system that has already decided which grief can alter allegiance.

The Bible as Shield

Scripture can become a shield against moral recognition.

The believer raises the text between the self and the world.

The shield does not prevent all perception.

It organizes perception.

The believer sees an Israeli death as individual tragedy.

A Palestinian death appears as part of a war initiated by Hamas.

The believer sees an unborn child as a person known by God.

An Iranian child appears within the unfortunate consequences of military necessity.

The believer sees Trump as persecuted.

A migrant harmed by policy appears as the result of law enforcement.

The categories are not entirely false.

Hamas did initiate atrocities.

Governments do possess legitimate security concerns.

Borders and laws matter.

Political prosecutions can be abused.

The shield works by making one part of reality morally decisive and another part secondary.

It is selective truth arranged to prevent a larger truth from becoming visible.

The Bible as Mirror

The same Bible can function differently.

Instead of shielding the reader from judgment, it can become a mirror.

The difference depends partly upon where the reader places himself in the story.

Closed biblicism tends to identify the believer with the faithful remnant, persecuted saints, biblical Israel, courageous prophets, Esther, Cyrus, the apostles, or the forces of divine victory.

Condemnatory passages are directed outward.

Pharaoh is the political enemy.

Babylon is secular culture.

The false prophets are liberal churches.

The persecutors are journalists, courts, universities, or government agencies.

The believer rarely imagines that he may be Pharaoh.

The church rarely imagines that it may be the royal prophets reassuring Ahab.

The nation rarely imagines that it may be empire.

The religious leader rarely imagines that proximity to power has made him a courtier.

The crowd rarely imagines that its demand for order may place it on the side of crucifixion.

Yet Scripture repeatedly directs judgment toward communities convinced of their own election.

The prophets accuse worshiping nations.

Jesus confronts religious authorities who know the text.

The disciples repeatedly misunderstand the kingdom.

The people nearest sacred history are not protected from blindness.

A Bible permitted to judge the reader can break the enclosure.

A Bible used only to prove that the reader already occupies the righteous side completes it.

Listening to the Excluded Reader

Interpretation changes when excluded people are permitted to speak.

This does not mean that suffering automatically produces correct theology.

Victims remain human and fallible.

Experience can illuminate, distort, deepen, or narrow interpretation.

But people who bear the consequences of a doctrine often see what protected interpreters do not.

A theology of war should hear civilians and soldiers.

A theology of immigration should hear migrants and border communities.

A theology of male authority should hear women who lived beneath it.

A theology of sexuality should hear people whose lives it governs.

A theology of Israel should hear Jewish disagreement and Palestinian testimony.

A theology of church authority should hear people harmed by churches.

The privileged reader may know the text.

The affected reader may reveal what the application does.

Both forms of knowledge matter.

Closed biblicism often treats experience as a threat because experience can expose consequences the favored interpretation did not include.

The Palestinian Christian says:

“This reading of the land has made my community invisible.”

The response cannot be only:

“But the Bible plainly says.”

The consequence is now part of the theological question.

A reading that continually protects one group’s sacred identity by diminishing another group’s humanity requires examination.

The human result does not automatically disprove the interpretation.

It prevents the interpreter from pretending the result is irrelevant.

The Fear Beneath Certainty

Why does the closed system resist correction so fiercely?

Part of the answer is power.

Institutions protect authority, reputation, money, access, and identity.

But fear also matters.

If one doctrine can be wrong, perhaps others can be wrong.

If the pastor was mistaken about Israel, perhaps he was mistaken about salvation.

If the prophecy chart was constructed rather than discovered, perhaps the Bible is less obvious than the believer was told.

If faithful Christians can disagree, perhaps certainty is not the measure of faith.

For a person raised inside a tightly integrated religious world, one question can threaten everything.

God.

Family.

Marriage.

Community.

Eternity.

Moral identity.

Belonging.

The fear is not foolish.

Religious reconstruction can be genuinely destabilizing.

The person may lose a church, friends, work, family trust, language, and the internal map that made life intelligible.

Certainty protects more than doctrine.

It protects home.

This is why moral evidence can be resisted even by people who are not indifferent to suffering.

Looking up may cost too much.

When Conscience Becomes the Enemy

The evangelical community often teaches that conscience can be corrupted.

This is true.

Conscience can reflect prejudice, self-interest, desire, fear, trauma, or cultural fashion.

Strong feeling does not prove moral truth.

But institutions and traditions can be corrupted too.

Pastors can rationalize.

Communities can normalize cruelty.

Political movements can reshape doctrine.

Claims of biblical certainty can serve power.

The possibility that conscience may err does not authorize the church to silence it.

Conscience is the place where the individual remains responsible even when authorities demand obedience.

The emerging exvangelical may initially experience conscience as guilt for questioning.

He has been taught that doubt reveals weak faith.

She has been taught that sympathy for disapproved people reflects compromise.

He has been taught that criticizing Christian leaders helps Christianity's enemies.

She has been taught that looking outside the approved network invites deception.

Eventually the direction of guilt changes.

The person no longer feels guilty primarily for questioning the institution.

He feels guilty for what he accepted while not questioning it.

The civilian deaths he made abstract.

The leader's dishonesty he excused.

The testimony he dismissed.

The people he reduced to political categories.

The prophecies he defended after they failed.

The certainty he called faith.

At that moment, conscience becomes dangerous to the closed system because conscience restores authority to reality.

The person refuses to allow a verse, chart, sermon, or political analogy to make what happened unhappen.

Hermeneutical Repentance

Leaving evangelicalism can become an act of hermeneutical repentance.

The person does not confess only that one doctrine was wrong.

He confesses that a way of reading protected him from responsibility.

The interpretation distributed sympathy unequally.

It made some people sacred and others strategic.

It protected the coalition from evidence.

It allowed human authority to disappear beneath divine language.

Hermeneutical repentance begins with several distinctions:

The Bible may be sacred.

My reading is not sacred.

The text may be authoritative.

My application is not infallible.

My community may preserve truth.

It may also preserve power.

My confidence may feel like faith.

It may be fear of uncertainty.

The world may oppose the Gospel.

But the world's opposition does not prove that every evangelical claim is the Gospel.

These distinctions do not destroy Scripture.

They release Scripture from the burden of guaranteeing every human conclusion made in its name.

From Sola Scriptura to Solus Logos

The alternative developed later in this book is not the abandonment of Scripture.

It is a refusal to make Scripture identical with a closed interpretation.

Christians confess not merely that God has spoken words but that the Word became flesh.

The final authority is the Logos—the living truth to which Scripture bears witness.

This introduces a test that political biblicism finds difficult to evade.

Does the interpretation resemble the truth it claims to reveal?

Does it require deception?

Does it make suffering less visible?

Does it protect rulers from judgment?

Does it distribute human worth according to nation, party, or prophecy?

Does it produce repentance, mercy, justice, and humility?

Or does it produce domination wrapped in biblical language?

A Logos-centered reading does not permit the believer to discard difficult texts.

It requires the reader to interpret them without turning the living Word into a weapon for human power.

The Logos judges the Bible reader.

The Logos judges the church.

The Logos judges the nation.

The Logos judges Israel and Iran.

The Logos judges Trump.

The Logos judges the exvangelical critic.

No identity becomes righteous merely because it has recognized the failures of another.

Looking Up Without Closing the Bible

Looking up from the Bible does not require closing it forever.

It means refusing to use the page as protection from the person.

The believer looks at the text.

Then the believer looks at what the interpretation has done.

He hears the sermon.

Then he hears the person affected by it.

She reads the prophecy.

Then she looks at the war justified through it.

He studies the land promise.

Then he sees the family living on the land.

The book and the world are not enemies.

The human face is not an interruption of theology.

If the Logos became flesh, the body before the reader also belongs within the act of interpretation.

The Bible never arrives alone.

Neither does the neighbor.

The closed system breaks when the believer permits both to be present at the same time.

The text remains.

The suffering remains.

The interpretation becomes answerable.

And for the first time, “the Bible plainly says” is followed by the question that should always have been there:

Have I understood it truthfully?

Chapter 5

I Am an Evangelical

“I was an evangelical” sounds like a completed sentence.

It places the identity safely in the past.

There was a former self who believed certain things, belonged to a particular community, trusted particular leaders, and interpreted the world through a particular theology. That self has now been left behind.

The phrase offers distance.

It may also offer too much innocence.

The person who leaves evangelicalism does not become someone untouched by it. The formation remains in memory, language, reflex, fear, conscience, imagination, and desire. The rejected beliefs do not disappear merely because they are rejected. The community may be gone, but the internal world it built can remain for years.

A more difficult confession is therefore possible:

I am an evangelical.

Not because I continue to defend everything now associated with the name.

Not because I accept the political obligations attached to it.

Not because I believe the institution still possesses authority over my faith.

I am an evangelical because evangelicalism helped make the person I am.

I carry its language.

I carry its injuries.

I carry its moral seriousness and its moral evasions.

I carry the certainty it gave me and the fear beneath that certainty.

I carry responsibility for what I believed, defended, ignored, and made invisible.

The word *am* does not reclaim the identity triumphantly.

It refuses to pretend that the person who participated in it was someone else.

The Desire for a Clean Break

Departure invites a story of liberation.

The former evangelical may want to divide life into two clear periods.

Before, there was ignorance.

After, there is understanding.

Before, there was fear.

After, there is freedom.

Before, there was dogma.

After, there is thought.

Before, there was cruelty.

After, there is compassion.

The division can be emotionally necessary. People leaving restrictive communities need language strong enough to separate themselves from authorities that still exert power over them.

Yet the story becomes dangerous when it grants the new self automatic innocence.

The habits of evangelicalism can survive evangelical doctrine.

Certainty can survive the loss of biblical inerrancy.

The division between saved and lost can become the division between enlightened and ignorant.

Heretics can become fascists, colonizers, Zionists, liberals, conservatives, fundamentalists, or any other category used to remove a person from moral consideration.

Excommunication can become cancellation.

Prophecy can become historical inevitability.

Divine election can become political purity.

The structure remains while the vocabulary changes.

Leaving the institution does not guarantee that the institution has left the person.

The harder work begins after departure.

The Former Self Is Not a Stranger

The former evangelical self may now be embarrassing.

He may have supported leaders the present self condemns.

She may have repeated claims she no longer believes.

He may have dismissed testimony that now appears morally urgent.

She may have defended doctrines that harmed people.

He may have treated Palestinian suffering as secondary to prophecy.

She may have believed that criticism of Israel was necessarily hostility toward Jews.

He may have viewed Iran primarily through biblical categories.

She may have accepted Trump as a providential instrument.

The temptation is to speak of that former person with contempt.

How could he have believed such things?

How could she have ignored what was visible?

How could he have trusted those leaders?

How could she have confused fear with faith?

But contempt toward the former self prevents understanding.

The earlier believer may have been sincere.

He may have wanted to obey God.

She may have believed eternal consequences depended upon correct doctrine.

He may have trusted parents, pastors, teachers, and friends who also acted sincerely.

She may have defended Israel because Jewish persecution appeared to make unwavering support morally necessary.

He may have supported Trump because he believed abortion, religious liberty, cultural instability, or institutional hostility presented overwhelming dangers.

She may have accepted military force because she believed Iran posed a genuine threat.

These motives do not make every conclusion right.

They belong in the record because responsibility without understanding becomes self-hatred.

The former self must be treated as both defendant and witness.

As defendant, he remains responsible for what he defended.

As witness, he can explain how the system worked.

He can explain how fear became obedience.

She can explain how certainty became safety.

He can explain why biblical interpretation felt more real than political evidence.

She can explain how belonging made contrary facts spiritually dangerous.

The objective is not acquittal.

It is truthful judgment.

What Evangelicalism Gave

A serious exvangelical account must acknowledge that evangelicalism did not give only harm.

For many people, it provided a language of moral seriousness.

It taught that choices matter.

It taught that human beings are answerable.

It taught that forgiveness is possible.

It taught that the individual life possesses eternal significance.

It gave songs, prayers, stories, friendships, rituals, teachers, family bonds, and a sense of participation in something larger than the self.

It taught believers to read.

It taught them to ask what a text demands.

It taught them that rulers stand beneath God.

It taught them that hypocrisy damages religious witness.

It taught them that repentance must be more than regret.

It taught them that truth should be spoken even when truth is costly.

These teachings can become the very resources through which evangelicalism is judged.

The movement creates a conscience and then discovers that the conscience cannot be controlled completely.

The child is taught that truth matters because God is truth.

The adult sees leaders defending claims they know are false.

The child is taught that every human life matters.

The adult sees foreign civilians converted into abstractions.

The child is taught that political rulers are not God.

The adult sees spiritual advisers surrounding a ruler with sacred identities.

The child is taught that repentance is necessary.

The adult sees institutions demand repentance from everyone except themselves.

The person leaves because the moral teaching survived the institution's abandonment of it.

This is one reason exvangelical departure may remain a form of faith.

The believer applies evangelical principles to evangelicalism.

The institution calls the result apostasy.

The Loss of an Interpreter

Religious identity often fuses distinct beliefs into one apparently indivisible structure.

God exists.

Jesus reveals God.

The Bible communicates divine truth.

My church interprets the Bible correctly.

My pastor can be trusted.

My political community defends Christian values.

The United States occupies a providential role.

Modern Israel fulfills biblical prophecy.

Donald Trump protects the people of God.

These propositions are not logically identical.

Inside a religious culture, they may be experienced as one body of faith.

Questioning one therefore threatens all.

A believer who questions Christian Zionism may fear that he is questioning Scripture.

A believer who condemns Trump may fear that she is betraying the church.

A believer who recognizes Palestinian humanity may be accused of hostility toward Israel, Jews, prophecy, or God.

A believer who opposes war with Iran may be accused of failing to resist evil.

The system survives by preventing differentiation.

Deconstruction begins when the propositions separate.

One can believe in God without believing that a pastor speaks reliably for God.

One can follow Jesus without accepting Christian nationalism.

One can read Scripture without believing every inherited interpretation is infallible.

One can care about Jewish safety without defending every act of an Israeli government.

One can condemn Hamas without treating Palestinian civilians as collectively guilty.

One can oppose Iran's rulers without believing that war against Iran is spiritual warfare.

One can reject Trump without rejecting Christianity.

These distinctions initially feel like destruction.

They may be the beginning of honesty.

The believer discovers that losing an interpreter is not the same as losing God.

The Persistent Evangelical Interior

The external departure may occur quickly.

The internal departure rarely does.

A person stops attending church.

She changes the word used to describe herself.

He unfollows religious leaders.

She refuses invitations to political prayer meetings.

He tells family members that he no longer identifies as evangelical.

But the internal evangelical world remains active.

The person may still experience doubt as danger.

He may still fear hell when questioning doctrine.

She may still hear biblical language inside ordinary thought.

He may still feel that suffering has a hidden purpose.

She may still interpret coincidence as providence.

He may still feel guilty for failing to pray.

She may still experience hymns as home.

He may still long for certainty even while recognizing what certainty did.

The body may leave the church before the imagination does.

This creates an identity that is neither simply evangelical nor completely post-evangelical.

The person can no longer return honestly.

He also cannot pretend the formation has vanished.

The name *exvangelical* expresses this condition well.

The prefix indicates departure.

The root remains.

The Social Cost of Departure

Evangelicalism is not only a system of ideas.

It is a social world.

Church may provide friendship, family structure, childcare, education, music, ritual, mutual assistance, professional connections, moral vocabulary, and a shared account of life's purpose.

Leaving can threaten all of these at once.

A person may lose friends who do not know how to relate outside the shared faith.

A marriage may become strained.

Parents may experience the departure as spiritual death.

Children may become subjects of conflict.

Employment may be threatened in ministries, schools, or religious institutions.

The former member may lose the place where births, marriages, illnesses, and deaths were interpreted communally.

This helps explain why people remain silent long after their beliefs have changed.

The cost of speech is not merely theological disagreement.

It is exile.

Political theology intensifies the danger because criticism of Trump, Israel, war, or Christian nationalism is not heard merely as a judgment about public affairs.

It is heard as an attack upon the people who built their lives around those commitments.

A criticism of Trump may be heard by parents as a condemnation of their vote.

A criticism of Christian Zionism may be heard by a pastor as rejection of the Bible.

A defense of Palestinians may be heard by friends as indifference to Jewish suffering.

A rejection of war may be heard as weakness toward evil.

The person speaks one sentence.

The community hears an entire abandonment.

Institutional Expulsion

Not every exvangelical consciously chooses departure.

Some are pushed out gradually.

The church may never issue a formal declaration.

No one announces:

You are no longer one of us.

Instead, recognition fades.

The person's questions become exhausting.

Her moral objections are treated as political distractions.

His criticism is described as bitterness.

Her compassion is interpreted as cultural compromise.

His refusal to support Trump becomes evidence that secular media has deceived him.

Her concern for Palestinians becomes hostility toward Israel.

His doubts about war become a failure to understand evil.

The person remains physically present but loses religious credibility.

He may still believe in God.

She may still affirm Christ.

He may still read Scripture.

She may still pray.

Yet political disagreement begins to outweigh theological continuity.

A politically aligned person with little visible devotional life is welcomed as a defender of Christianity.

A deeply committed Christian who challenges the coalition is treated as suspect.

At that point, evangelical identity has changed.

The institution has attached new entrance requirements.

The person may eventually leave, but the departure began inside the community.

The label *exvangelical* names an institutional expulsion before it names a theological conclusion.

Shame and Responsibility

Departure often produces shame.

The former evangelical looks backward and sees the person who accepted what the present self can no longer defend.

Shame says:

I was one of them.

Something is wrong with what I am.

Guilt says:

I participated in something wrong.

I must tell the truth and change.

The difference matters.

Shame can become endless self-rejection.

It makes the former self contaminating.

The person attempts to prove moral transformation through contempt for everyone who remains.

Guilt can become responsibility.

It asks what was done, who was harmed, what must be corrected, and what actions can now be taken.

The goal is not to deny complicity.

It is to prevent complicity from becoming identity without end.

The person can acknowledge:

I repeated false claims.

I ignored suffering.

I defended a leader because his power served my interests.

I allowed prophecy to organize my sympathy.

I treated political opponents as spiritually suspect.

I remained silent because belonging mattered more than truth.

Then another sentence becomes possible:

I will not continue.

Responsibility is not self-punishment.

It is the recovery of agency.

Confessing the Religious System

Evangelicalism places strong emphasis upon personal confession.

The sinner names wrongdoing and returns to God.

But confession usually occurs within a framework the institution controls.

The person confesses departure from accepted teaching.

He confesses sexual sin, anger, dishonesty, doubt, pride, or rebellion.

She is restored through renewed submission to the religious community's interpretation.

The exvangelical confession moves in another direction.

The person confesses participation in the system itself.

I confess that I excused cruelty because the cruel person promised political victories.

I confess that I called domination strength.

I confess that I interpreted the suffering of some people as less important because they appeared on the wrong side of prophecy.

I confess that I treated doubt as sin even when doubt was conscience refusing to die.

I confess that I allowed Scripture to protect me from what was visible.

I confess that I defended Christianity's reputation more urgently than I defended people harmed in Christianity's name.

Such confession does not necessarily lead back to the institution.

The institution may be among the objects of repentance.

Returning without transformation could repeat the wrong.

The person confronts a question evangelical theology rarely prepared him to answer:

How does one repent of the community that taught repentance?

The church may say:

Come home.

The person may answer:

Repentance requires that I not return to the same blindness.

Departure becomes a form of penance.

Addressing God Directly

A book about leaving evangelicalism can be written to many audiences.

It can explain the movement to outsiders.

It can defend former members against accusations of apostasy.

It can expose abuses.

It can guide people through deconstruction.

It can criticize theology, politics, institutions, and leaders.

Another form is possible.

The exvangelical can address God.

God is not placed on trial as a proposition to be proved or disproved.

The former evangelical self is placed before God.

The question is not:

Why did You fail to meet my evangelical expectations?

The question becomes:

What did we do in Your name?

This structure preserves belief while rejecting religious innocence.

The speaker does not need to know whether every former doctrine remains intact.

The act of address itself contains residual faith.

He speaks because God may still be listening.

The prayer can contain lament, confession, accusation, anger, uncertainty, repentance, and hope.

The speaker can accuse leaders.

She can accuse the church.

He can accuse the nation.

She can accuse the Israeli government.

He can accuse Trump.

But the confession must eventually reach the self.

Otherwise exvangelicalism becomes another theology of innocence.

Why the Deception Was Attractive

The former believer can say:

They misled me.

That may be true.

But confession must continue.

Why was the message attractive?

Did it provide certainty?

Did it offer membership among the chosen?

Did it transform political fear into spiritual courage?

Did it permit aggression while preserving the self-image of righteousness?

Did it turn complex history into a simple battle between good and evil?

Did it offer access to power without requiring acknowledgment that power was desired?

Did it make the believer feel persecuted while the believer's movement possessed substantial influence?

Did it make national strength feel like divine protection?

The answer may involve fear rather than hatred.

Fear of social collapse.

Fear of abortion.

Fear of secularization.

Fear of Islam.

Fear of immigration.

Fear of antisemitism.

Fear of losing America.

Fear of losing children to a changing culture.

Fear of discovering that the Bible is less obvious than promised.

Fear of losing salvation if the system proves wrong.

Political theology gives fear a sacred structure.

The enemy is named.

The leader is chosen.

The battle is explained.

The outcome is promised.

Uncertainty is replaced by belonging.

This is why evidence alone may not break the system.

The interpretation is performing emotional work.

It makes the world bearable.

Looking up threatens not merely a doctrine but the structure through which fear has been contained.

Faith After Certainty

Evangelicalism often presents certainty as evidence of faith.

The believer knows that God exists.

He knows that Scripture is true.

She knows that she is saved.

He knows which doctrines are essential.

She knows where history is going.

Doubt may be tolerated as a temporary struggle on the way back to assurance.

After the enclosure breaks, certainty may no longer be available.

The person may still believe in God but be unable to describe inspiration as before.

She may still follow Jesus but question inherited theories of salvation.

He may continue reading Scripture while recognizing its historical complexity.

She may pray without knowing exactly what prayer changes.

He may hope for resurrection without claiming certainty.

This faith can appear weak when judged by evangelical standards.

It may require greater courage.

Certainty says:

I possess the truth.

Faith after certainty says:

I remain answerable to truth even when I cannot possess it.

The first eliminates risk by enclosing reality.

The second accepts vulnerability.

The exvangelical may discover that faith is not the absence of uncertainty.

It is the refusal to purchase certainty through dishonesty.

Christ After Christian Power

For some exvangelicals, Jesus becomes more important after evangelical certainty collapses.

Not because every historical or theological problem disappears.

Not because the person has discovered an interpretation free from culture.

Jesus becomes important as a judgment upon Christian power.

The teacher who refuses domination judges Christian nationalism.

The one who makes the outsider a neighbor judges ethnic hierarchy.

The person executed through cooperation between religious and political authority judges court theology.

The crucified one judges every attempt to compare the ruler with the victim while ignoring victims of the ruler.

When Trump is portrayed as persecuted like Jesus, sympathy moves upward toward power.

A cruciform reading moves attention downward toward those who bear power's cost.

Who is detained?

Who is deported?

Who is displaced?

Who is bombed?

Who is silenced?

Who is converted into a category before violence is applied?

The exvangelical may begin to suspect that Jesus is found less securely in the presidential prayer circle than among those whose suffering the prayer circle explains away.

God Beyond the Coalition

Political evangelicalism frequently acts as though God's reputation depends upon the coalition's success.

If Trump loses, Christianity loses.

If conservative judges are not appointed, divine order recedes.

If Israel is restrained, prophecy is threatened.

If America becomes less explicitly Christian, God has been expelled.

If evangelical institutions lose cultural authority, persecution has begun.

This produces a vulnerable God who must be protected by political power.

The exvangelical departure releases God from that dependency.

God is not the Republican Party.

God is not the United States.

God is not the modern State of Israel.

God is not evangelicalism.

God is not the believer's former certainty.

The collapse of the coalition is not the collapse of God.

This distinction allows political judgment without metaphysical panic.

A president can be merely a president.

A government can be merely a government.

A military action can be judged as a military action.

A biblical interpretation can be challenged without threatening the existence of truth.

The loss of certainty may enlarge transcendence.

God becomes more than the guarantor of one political order.

I Still Believe

“I still believe in God” can mean several things.

It may mean that the person continues to affirm God’s existence.

It may mean that he still prays despite uncertainty.

It may mean that she cannot remove God from consciousness after rejecting inherited doctrines.

It may mean that conscience, beauty, suffering, love, or the figure of Christ continues to point beyond the self.

It may mean that the person refuses to allow corrupt representatives to possess the final meaning of God.

The word *still* carries the history.

I believed before Trump.

I believed while defending Trump.

I believed while beginning to doubt those defenses.

I believed while watching Gaza.

I believed while hearing war called spiritual.

I believed while leaving the church.

I believe now, but not in the same way.

The persistence of belief does not prove that the reconstructed theology is correct.

It proves that departure from evangelicalism cannot be reduced to disbelief.

A Confession to the God Who Remains

God, I believed that defending Your truth required defending those who claimed to defend You.

I believed that the enemies of my church were Your enemies.

I believed that political victory confirmed faithfulness.

I believed that national power could serve righteousness without corrupting those who possessed it.

I believed that biblical promises allowed me to decide whose suffering mattered most.

I believed that prophecy relieved me of uncertainty.

I believed that refusing contrary evidence was faith.

I believed that doubt endangered my salvation more than cruelty endangered my soul.

I now confess that I often loved certainty more than truth.

I loved belonging more than repentance.

I loved a victorious God because I feared the crucified one.

I treated Scripture as protection from the neighbor placed before me.

I saw Trump's enemies more clearly than I saw those harmed by his power.

I saw Israel's biblical meaning more clearly than I saw Palestinians.

I saw Iran as prophecy more clearly than I saw Iranians.

I saw persecution in every criticism and failed to recognize the power exercised in my name.

I do not know how much of my former faith was faith and how much was fear.

I do not know which doctrines will survive.

I do not know where I belong.

But I still speak to You.

I still believe that truth matters because You are not served by lies.

I still believe that mercy matters because power cannot define the good.

I still believe that every human being exceeds the role assigned by politics or prophecy.

I still believe that repentance must begin with those who invoke Your name.

I have left evangelicalism because I could no longer defend what evangelicalism asked me to defend.

I reject the person I became within it, but I cannot pretend that person was someone else.

I bring that former self before You.

I do not ask You to restore my certainty.

I ask You to teach me how to see.

The Exvangelical Witness

The exvangelical occupies a difficult position between worlds.

The committed insider knows the language, emotions, relationships, and spiritual attractions of evangelicalism but may lack the distance necessary to examine them.

The secular critic may see the political consequences clearly but misunderstand why the system remains compelling to sincere believers.

The exvangelical knows both.

He knows what it felt like to believe the system was true.

She knows what it cost to recognize its failures.

This position can produce anger.

It can also produce insight.

The exvangelical can explain that the problem is not simply ignorance.

It involves salvation, family, trust, fear, belonging, identity, and the possibility that questioning one political claim might dissolve the entire structure of meaning.

The exvangelical can also testify that the collapse of the structure need not end in nihilism.

Moral meaning can survive institutional failure.

Faith can survive certainty.

God can survive the people who claimed exclusive authority to interpret God.

This testimony threatens the institution's final defense:

Outside evangelicalism there is only unbelief, chaos, and moral collapse.

The believing exvangelical demonstrates another possibility.

One may leave and continue praying.

One may doubt and remain accountable.

One may reject inerrancy without despising Scripture.

One may reject Christian Zionism without despising Jews.

One may reject Christian nationalism without despising one's country.

One may condemn war without pretending Iran's rulers are innocent.

One may oppose Israel's destruction of Gaza without excusing Hamas.

One may lose the evangelical self and continue seeking God.

The Danger of a New Innocence

The exvangelical must not turn departure into proof of righteousness.

Former evangelicals can reproduce the same patterns they condemn.

A new political community can become another church.

It can possess doctrine, sacred language, moral purity, rituals of belonging, and enemies beyond sympathy.

The former believer can become incapable of hearing any truth from those who remain evangelical.

He can assign collective guilt.

She can assume that every Trump supporter acts from hatred.

He can use *Zionist* as a total moral category.

She can romanticize any force opposed to the United States or Israel.

He can become certain that his compassion is never selective.

The cure for evangelical blindness is not a new blindness aimed in the opposite direction.

The person must remain open to correction.

Israeli suffering must complicate the account of Palestine.

Palestinian suffering must complicate the account of Israel.

Iranian civilians must complicate the judgment of Iran's government.

Real security threats must complicate easy political moralizing.

History must complicate prophecy.

Evidence must complicate ideology.

The former evangelical must accept that he can be wrong again.

This is the difference between reversal and repentance.

Reversal exchanges sides.

Repentance changes the relationship to being certain that one's side is righteous.

The Meaning of “I Am”

“I am an evangelical” can therefore carry several meanings at once.

I am the person evangelicalism formed.

I am responsible for what I believed in that formation.

I retain gifts received there.

I retain wounds received there.

I cannot place the earlier self outside my moral history.

I also refuse the political theology now attached to the name.

I refuse to identify Trump with providence.

I refuse to make war sacred.

I refuse to grant biblical immunity to a government.

I refuse to let prophecy erase a population.

I refuse to call the institution’s interpretation the voice of God without remainder.

The phrase is not a declaration of institutional loyalty.

It is a confession of continuing responsibility.

The person belongs to the history but not to the faction.

He carries the language but rejects the enclosure.

She inherits the Gospel but refuses the political brand.

The evangelical self stands before God.

The exvangelical self stands before the institution.

Both are true.

The Person Who Looked Up

The institution may say the person has fallen away.

The person may understand what happened differently.

He did not stop caring about truth.

He discovered that truth required questioning those who claimed to possess it.

She did not stop caring about life.

She discovered that the church grieved some lives more deeply than others.

He did not reject Scripture because it demanded too much.

He rejected an interpretation that demanded blindness.

She did not leave because God became impossible.

She left because the institutional substitute for God became visible.

The departure did not erase evangelicalism.

It revealed what evangelicalism had placed inside the person.

The conscience.

The demand for truth.

The hatred of hypocrisy.

The belief that rulers must be judged.

The conviction that repentance is possible.

Those teachings survived long enough to turn against the institution that had suspended them.

The exvangelical may therefore say:

I am an evangelical because I remain responsible for the self formed there.

I am an exvangelical because I no longer consent to the authority that formed me.

I still believe because God was never identical to that authority.

I left because I finally looked up.

And when I looked, the world did not become empty of God.

It became full of people my theology had taught me not to see

Chapter 6

From Sola Scriptura to Solus Logos

The collapse of certainty leaves a vacuum.

It is not enough to say that evangelical leaders were wrong about Trump.

It is not enough to reject Christian nationalism, Christian Zionism, sacred war, biblical inerrancy, or the political uses of prophecy.

It is not enough to expose the hidden authorities behind the claim that “the Bible plainly says.”

A person can dismantle every inherited authority and still remain unable to answer the central question:

By what standard am I judging them?

Conscience is necessary, but conscience can be distorted.

Compassion is necessary, but compassion can be selective.

Reason is necessary, but reason can rationalize domination.

Historical evidence is necessary, but history can be manipulated.

Human-rights language is necessary, but it can be applied inconsistently.

The testimony of suffering people is necessary, but suffering does not make every interpretation or action of the sufferer morally correct.

Political communities can construct new orthodoxies as rigid as the religious systems they replace.

The believing exvangelical therefore needs more than freedom from authority.

He needs an account of authority that remains capable of correction.

This book proposes such an account under the phrase:

Solus Logos.

The phrase is not an established Reformation slogan. It is not presented as a magic formula or a new doctrine capable of eliminating interpretation.

It is a confession of limitation.

Solus Logos means that God’s living truth—not an institution, ruler, nation, political coalition, isolated text, private conscience, or favored interpreter—possesses final authority.

Scripture remains essential.

But Scripture is understood as testimony to the Logos, not as an instrument through which human readers acquire divine infallibility.

The movement is not from the Bible to autonomous opinion.

It is from closed textual certainty to living accountability.

The Word Is Not Finally a Book

The proposal begins with the opening of the Gospel of John:

“In the beginning was the Word.”

The Greek term *Logos* carries meanings that exceed the English word *word*. It can suggest speech, reason, meaning, intelligibility, ordering principle, account, revelation, and truth.

Within John’s Gospel, the Logos is not merely information God communicates.

The Logos is with God.

The Logos is God.

The Logos becomes flesh.

This places a limit upon every theology of textual authority.

The Word of God is not finally a book.

The Word of God is not a doctrinal system.

The Word of God is not a prophecy chart.

The Word of God is not the political destiny of the United States.

The Word of God is not the military program of Israel.

The Word of God is not Donald Trump.

The Word becomes flesh.

This does not diminish Scripture.

It distinguishes Scripture from the reality to which Scripture bears witness.

The Bible possesses authority because it communicates, preserves, and participates in testimony to God—not because printed sentences can be detached from history and made to authorize whatever a trusted institution desires.

The distinction is similar to the difference between a window and the light entering through it.

The window matters.

Without it, the light may not enter the room in the same way.

But the window is not the sun.

Scratches, frames, colors, angles, and accumulated dust can affect what is seen through it.

To honor the window does not require pretending that looking through it involves no conditions.

To honor Scripture does not require pretending that human beings encounter it without translation, interpretation, history, tradition, interest, or error.

The Interpreter Does Not Possess the Logos

Closed biblicism quietly places the interpreter in possession of divine truth.

The believer says that God possesses the truth.

In practice, the believer or institution determines what God has said, which passages control, how they apply, and which modern actors occupy the approved biblical roles.

The interpretive community assigns the identities.

Trump is Cyrus.

Israel is biblical Israel.

Iran is Persia.

The political opponent is Babylon.

The enemy is Amalek.

The believer is Esther, the faithful remnant, or the persecuted saint.

The interpretation organizes reality so completely that God appears to confirm every prior assignment.

Solus Logos reverses the relationship.

The interpreter does not possess the Logos.

The interpreter stands beneath the Logos.

The purpose of reading is no longer merely to confirm that the reader belongs to the righteous side.

Reading becomes an encounter in which the reader may be exposed, contradicted, and judged.

The reader may not be Esther.

He may be Haman.

The nation may not be Israel.

It may be Egypt or Rome.

The church may not be the persecuted remnant.

It may be the royal priesthood flattering the king.

The favored ruler may not be Cyrus.

He may be Pharaoh.

The supposed enemy may be the neighbor.

The person beneath the bomb may stand closer to the crucified Logos than the people blessing the bombing.

This instability is spiritually uncomfortable.

It removes the assurance that one's preferred identity has already been divinely assigned.

It also restores the possibility that Scripture can judge the reader rather than merely arm him.

What Does the Analogy Do?

A theology centered upon the Logos does not eliminate biblical analogy.

Human beings understand present events partly through inherited stories. Biblical images can illuminate courage, injustice, exile, liberation, corruption, empire, sacrifice, betrayal, hope, and endurance.

The question is not whether analogy will be used.

The question is what the analogy does.

Does it illuminate responsibility?

Does it deepen compassion?

Does it expose power?

Does it encourage repentance?

Does it make political actors more accountable?

Or does it transfer sacred innocence to one side and sacred guilt to another?

Does it explain why the ruler should not be judged?

Does it turn a population into an ancient enemy?

Does it make suffering morally secondary?

Does it replace evidence with recognition of a predetermined pattern?

An analogy that makes the powerful less accountable and the suffering less visible has failed, regardless of how many verses can be assembled in its defense.

This is an important limit.

Biblical accuracy cannot be measured only by verbal resemblance.

A modern leader may resemble Cyrus in one respect and Pharaoh in another.

A nation may experience threat while also exercising oppressive power.

A people may possess a profound history of suffering while causing suffering to another people.

No analogy exhausts a human being, government, or conflict.

The sacred story must not become a prison in which contemporary people are forced to perform predetermined roles.

The Logos as Truth

The Logos is inseparable from truth.

This places deception, propaganda, and self-sealing interpretation under theological judgment.

A political theology cannot serve the Logos while requiring believers to deny evident facts.

It cannot become more faithful by dismissing every inconvenient report as persecution.

It cannot claim divine authority while remaining structurally incapable of admitting error.

Truth is not whatever protects the religious coalition.

Truth is not whatever benefits the chosen nation.

Truth is not whatever preserves the believer's confidence.

Truth is not whatever confirms prophecy after every possible outcome.

The Logos cannot be reduced to the survival mechanism of an ideology.

This has direct consequences for political theology.

Claims about elections, immigration, Iran, Gaza, civilian casualties, military necessity, religious persecution, or prophetic fulfillment must remain accountable to evidence.

Faith does not abolish the obligation to distinguish:

what is known,

what is alleged,

what is inferred,

what is disputed,

and what remains uncertain.

A theology that treats factual correction as spiritual attack has ceased to worship truth.

It worships immunity from correction.

Solus Logos therefore requires epistemic repentance.

The believer must remain capable of saying:

I was wrong.

My source was unreliable.

My church repeated propaganda.

My interpretation protected my political preference.

The evidence does not support what I claimed.

The biblical analogy failed.

The prophecy did not occur.

The person I distrusted was telling the truth.

These statements are not threats to faith.

They are evidence that faith remains answerable to truth.

The Cost of Saying "I Was Wrong"

Religious communities often treat certainty as strength and revision as weakness.

A leader who changes his mind appears unreliable.

A prophecy teacher who acknowledges failure risks losing authority.

A political ministry that admits spreading false claims risks losing donors.

A church that confesses misusing Scripture risks litigation, division, humiliation, or public disgrace.

The institution therefore has strong incentives to preserve its previous claims.

Language becomes useful.

The prophecy was not false; it was conditional.

The prediction was not wrong; the timing was misunderstood.

The leader was not deceptive; he was speaking strategically.

The war was not misguided; the enemy frustrated the original plan.

The humanitarian account was not accurate; hostile institutions manipulated the data.

The failed interpretation does not disappear.

It is revised just enough to preserve the authority of those who made it.

Solus Logos introduces another measure of strength.

The strong institution is not the one that never changes.

It is the one capable of surviving truthful confession.

The strong faith is not the one that cannot be contradicted.

It is the one that does not require falsehood to remain faith.

The Logos Becomes Flesh

The doctrine of incarnation resists the transformation of theology into abstraction.

The Logos becomes flesh, not territory.

The Logos becomes flesh, not military supremacy.

The Logos becomes flesh, not national destiny.

The Logos becomes flesh, not interpretive certainty.

Bodies therefore possess theological significance.

Hunger, injury, displacement, imprisonment, fear, grief, and death are not secondary phenomena beneath a supposedly deeper spiritual story.

The body beneath the rubble interrupts the interpretation.

The wounded soldier interrupts the triumphal speech.

The Israeli hostage interrupts the romanticization of armed resistance.

The starving Palestinian child interrupts Christian Zionist prophecy.

The Iranian civilian interrupts the conversion of Persia into a military target.

The migrant family interrupts nationalist abstraction.

The incarnation does not provide a simple political formula.

Images can mislead.

Governments and armed organizations can manipulate sympathy.

Victimhood does not make every action of a victimized person or community righteous.

A serious ethic must still examine cause, responsibility, threat, intention, power, and consequence.

Yet embodiment establishes a limit:

No interpretation is morally complete if it can explain suffering while remaining unchanged by it.

The Logos made flesh means that theological truth must survive contact with bodies.

The Crucified Logos

Christianity does not confess only that the Logos became human.

It confesses that the Logos was crucified.

This supplies a decisive criterion for judging political power.

Jesus is not killed by abstract evil.

He is killed through cooperation among political calculation, religious accusation, crowd pressure, imperial violence, and the preservation of institutional order.

The authorities act for reasons they consider defensible.

They protect stability.

They contain disorder.

They neutralize a perceived threat.

They satisfy public demand.

They use lawful state violence.

Court theology reverses this revelation.

It places the ruler in the position of the crucified.

Criticism of the ruler becomes persecution.

Trump becomes the suffering innocent.

The victims of policies enacted under presidential authority disappear.

Powerful people can be treated unjustly.

A president does not cease to possess rights because he is powerful.

But the central Christian symbol cannot be monopolized by rulers seeking moral exemption.

The cross directs attention toward those whom political and religious systems can injure without hearing.

Whose body bears the cost of the policy?

Who is imprisoned?

Who is displaced?

Who is bombed?

Who is silenced?

Who is treated as expendable?

Who has been reduced to a category—terrorist, illegal, Amalek, Persian, collateral damage, enemy of the people—before violence is applied?

The crucified Logos does not supply an automatic policy platform.

It destroys the illusion that victory proves righteousness.

Rome was victorious at Golgotha.

The religious authorities preserved order.

The crowd obtained its demand.

The state completed the execution.

If political success were evidence of divine favor, the cross would vindicate the empire rather than expose it.

The Upward Transfer of Victimhood

Political movements often transfer the language of victimhood upward.

The most powerful person in the country becomes the principal victim.

The institution with access to government describes itself as silenced.

The religious majority interprets the loss of cultural dominance as persecution.

The state using military force presents itself only as vulnerable.

The government controlling borders, prisons, weapons, surveillance, and law speaks as though it possesses no power at all.

Real vulnerability may exist within these claims.

Political leaders can be attacked unfairly.

Christians can experience discrimination.

Israelis face genuine security threats.

American institutions can act abusively.

The problem appears when vulnerability is used to erase power.

The crucified Logos requires both to be examined.

Who is threatened?

Who possesses the capacity to act?

Who can impose consequences?

Who can leave?

Who controls the weapons, courts, borders, media access, and institutions?

Who bears the physical cost?

A morally serious theology cannot identify the victim only by listening to who speaks most loudly about persecution.

It must examine the distribution of power.

The Logos and the Neighbor

The political theology criticized in this book depends upon abstraction.

Trump's opponents become enemies of the people.

Iranians become Persia.

Palestinians become Hamas, Amalek, or demographic impediments.

Israelis become either sacred embodiments of prophecy or colonial symbols.

Jews become instruments of Christian eschatology.

Evangelicals become caricatures of stupidity or malice.

Solus Logos requires the recovery of the neighbor from every abstraction.

The neighbor is not simply the person who confirms one's moral worldview.

The neighbor is often the person whose existence prevents that worldview from becoming complete too easily.

The Israeli mother whose child was killed or abducted complicates any account that romanticizes armed resistance.

The Palestinian father whose family was buried beneath rubble complicates any account that treats military destruction as uncomplicated self-defense.

The Iranian dissident complicates romantic accounts of Iran's rulers.

The Iranian civilian beneath American bombing complicates sacred accounts of regime confrontation.

The evangelical grandmother who sincerely fears social collapse complicates the portrayal of every Trump supporter as consciously cruel.

The former evangelical rejected by his family complicates the claim that evangelical community is uniformly loving.

The neighbor does not eliminate moral judgment.

Recognition is not moral equivalence.

Hamas, the Israeli government, Iran's rulers, the United States, religious leaders, armed forces, and individual civilians do not possess equal power or responsibility in every situation.

Seeing the neighbor means refusing to let judgment erase personhood.

The Logos does not command blindness to wrongdoing.

It prevents wrongdoing from becoming the total definition of a human being or population.

Chosenness Without Immunity

Religious and national identities often seek chosenness without judgment.

America is chosen to defend freedom.

Israel is chosen through covenant.

Evangelicals are chosen to preserve biblical truth.

Trump is chosen as an instrument.

Once the identity is chosen, criticism appears to threaten divine purpose.

The biblical tradition repeatedly refuses this arrangement.

Election does not eliminate accountability.

It intensifies it.

The chosen nation remains capable of injustice.

The covenant people remain capable of oppression.

The church possessing Scripture remains capable of corruption.

The leader used by providence remains morally responsible.

Solus Logos applies this accountability universally.

No covenant interpretation makes a government infallible.

No national history makes another people disposable.

No election victory proves divine endorsement.

No military victory establishes justice.

No religious office guarantees prophetic courage.

No spiritual experience removes the need for correction.

No claim of persecution proves innocence.

The Logos is not the possession of the chosen.

The chosen remain answerable to the Logos.

Jewish Life and the Logos

A Logos-centered theology must reject both antisemitic Christianity and Christian Zionist political absolutism.

It must reject the idea that Jewish history has been erased or that the church has simply replaced the Jewish people as though Jewish survival were theologically meaningless.

Centuries of Christian antisemitism make such claims morally and historically dangerous.

But the same theology must reject the idea that a modern state possesses unconditional authorization through biblical covenant.

Jewish life cannot be reduced to a Christian prophetic function.

Jewish people do not exist to confirm Christian readings of the end times.

Palestinian life cannot be erased by a Christian interpretation of Jewish election.

The Logos does not force Christians to decide which people God is permitted to love.

Concern for Jewish safety and concern for Palestinian life arise from the same refusal to convert a population into a theological abstraction.

Scripture Under Solus Logos

A serious objection now appears.

If the Logos stands above Scripture, how does the believer know the Logos except through fallible interpretations?

There is no escape from mediation.

The Logos is encountered through Scripture, tradition, worship, reason, history, conscience, community, experience, nature, and the testimony of others.

None provides uninterpreted access to God.

Solus Logos does not solve this difficulty by inventing a private route to divine truth.

It refuses to identify any one mediation with God without remainder.

Scripture remains uniquely important because it preserves the foundational testimony through which Christians know Israel's history, the prophetic tradition, Jesus, the early church, and the Christian account of salvation.

Without Scripture, *Logos* could become an empty word for whatever the interpreter already prefers.

Yet Scripture cannot be isolated from the reality to which it testifies.

The text must be read through attention to language, history, genre, canonical diversity, Jewish interpretation, Christian tradition, scholarship, lived consequence, and the communities affected by its application.

A theology of land should hear Jewish and Palestinian histories.

A theology of war should hear soldiers and civilians.

A theology of immigration should hear migrants and border communities.

A theology of sexuality should hear the people whose lives it governs.

A doctrine of male authority should hear women who lived beneath it.

A doctrine of church authority should hear people abused by churches.

Experience does not automatically overrule Scripture.

Experience can reveal what protected interpreters failed to see.

Conscience Without Infallibility

After institutional authority collapses, the exvangelical may turn toward conscience.

This is necessary.

It is also dangerous.

Private conscience can become another infallible authority.

The former believer may replace:

“The Bible plainly says”

with:

“My conscience plainly says.”

Strong moral feeling does not prove correctness.

Conscience must be informed by evidence.

It must hear affected people.

It must examine its interests.

It must distinguish discomfort from injustice.

It must recognize trauma, tribal loyalty, prejudice, and self-deception.

It must accept correction from communities and traditions.

Yet conscience remains the place where the individual encounters institutional commands as personal moral demands.

No church can relieve the believer of responsibility by saying obedience was required.

No president can make a war righteous merely by declaring it necessary.

No government can erase civilian humanity through official classification.

No religious leader can absorb another person's moral agency.

The conscience is fallible.

Surrendering it does not eliminate responsibility.

It merely makes responsibility easier to deny.

Community Without Compulsory Unanimity

Closed biblicism cannot be answered by authoritarian tradition.

It also cannot be answered by isolated private interpretation.

The alternative requires communities capable of disagreement without expulsion.

Such a community would not possess one political test of Christian authenticity.

A believer could oppose Trump without being treated as an apostate.

A Christian could support conservative policies without being assumed to endorse Christian nationalism.

A person could condemn Hamas and Israeli military conduct simultaneously.

A believer could oppose war without being described as weak toward evil.

The community would protect testimony.

Palestinian Christians would not appear only as objects of charity or obstacles to prophecy.

Jewish voices would not be reduced to those supporting policies favored by American Christians.

Former evangelicals would not be interpreted exclusively by the leaders they left.

Survivors of religious abuse would not be required to protect the institution's reputation.

Scholars would not be dismissed merely because knowledge complicates certainty.

A community under the Logos would be organized around mutual accountability rather than compulsory unanimity.

Its members could say:

I do not know.

I may be wrong.

I need to hear more.

My tradition has an interest in this conclusion.

The evidence changed my mind.

These statements would not indicate weak faith.

They would indicate intellectual and moral life.

Apocalyptic Hope Without Apocalyptic Capture

Apocalyptic expectation becomes dangerous when contemporary events are assigned fixed roles inside a predetermined sacred sequence.

Iran becomes Persia.

Russia becomes Gog.

Israel becomes prophecy.

War becomes inevitable.

Suffering becomes a sign that history approaches fulfillment.

Solus Logos distinguishes hope from prediction.

Christian hope may affirm that injustice is not ultimate.

It may trust that history possesses meaning beyond domination and death.

It may anticipate judgment, reconciliation, resurrection, or renewal.

But hope does not require the believer to identify every modern government with an ancient symbol.

It does not authorize catastrophe in order to accelerate redemption.

It does not make preventable war desirable because war appears in an apocalyptic text.

The Logos is not a timetable political leaders can fulfill through violence.

No president can bomb the world into the kingdom of God.

No annexation can force divine completion.

No casualty count proves that prophecy is on schedule.

Any eschatology that requires indifference to preventable suffering has allowed an imagined future to devour the neighbor in the present.

Political Restraint

Solus Logos does not produce a single party platform.

Christians centered upon the Logos may continue to disagree about abortion, taxation, immigration, regulation, criminal justice, welfare, military force, education, and the limits of government.

The proposal provides moral restraints rather than a complete policy code.

Political power remains accountable to truth.

The person affected by policy must not disappear into abstraction.

Violence carries an exceptional burden of justification.

National interest cannot be identified with divine purpose.

The enemy retains humanity.

The ruler remains fallible.

Religious authority must not function as propaganda for the state.

No policy becomes righteous merely because Christians support it.

No coalition possesses exclusive access to God.

These restraints do not eliminate difficult judgment.

They prevent difficult judgment from being replaced by sacred certainty.

A government may sometimes use force.

But force must be defended through evidence, law, necessity, restraint, and consequence—not through comparisons between the president and biblical deliverers.

A state may possess legitimate security concerns.

But security does not eliminate every limit upon what may be done to civilians.

A nation may preserve borders.

But migrants cannot be converted into a demonic invasion.

A society may debate abortion.

But concern for life cannot end at birth, nationality, race, religion, or the boundary of a favored constituency.

The Logos requires moral continuity.

A New Protestant Protest

Solus Logos can be understood as a renewal of the Protestant protest against unaccountable authority.

The Reformation insisted that religious institutions could not place themselves beyond correction.

Evangelical biblicism has sometimes generated a new magisterium while denying that it is a magisterium.

Pastors, publishers, media networks, political organizations, seminaries, donors, and charismatic advisers collectively establish authorized interpretations.

Because the authority is distributed, it becomes difficult to name.

Because it speaks through biblical language, it appears to possess no institutional interest.

The believing exvangelical can therefore issue another protest:

The church is not the Logos.

The pastor is not the Logos.

The study Bible is not the Logos.

The denominational statement is not the Logos.

The prophecy teacher is not the Logos.

The political platform is not the Logos.

The president's spiritual adviser is not the Logos.

My conscience is not the Logos.

My interpretation is not the Logos.

Even the phrase *Solus Logos* is not the Logos.

The proposal defeats itself if it becomes another instrument of immunity.

It must remain a confession of limitation, not a slogan of possession.

The Risk of Inventing a Convenient Jesus

A Logos-centered theology faces a serious danger.

The interpreter may construct a Jesus who reflects contemporary moral preferences.

“Christlike” can come to mean whatever appears compassionate, inclusive, peaceful, or progressive to the person using the term.

Conservative evangelicals are not the only people capable of selective interpretation.

Liberal Christianity can select the Jesus it prefers.

Progressive Christianity can select the Jesus it prefers.

Christian nationalism can select the Jesus it prefers.

The exvangelical can construct a Jesus who agrees perfectly with every conclusion reached after departure.

The answer is not a return to interpretive denial.

It is disciplined plurality.

The Logos must be sought through the whole scriptural witness, including passages that disturb modern readers.

The historical and Jewish context of Jesus must be taken seriously.

Christian tradition must be heard without being made infallible.

The voices of suffering people must be included without making victimhood equivalent to moral perfection.

Reason and evidence must test claims.

Communities must examine interpretations over time.

The believer must remain open to the possibility that compassion itself has been manipulated or selectively distributed.

Solus Logos is not easier than closed biblicism.

It offers less certainty and greater responsibility.

The closed system says:

“The Bible has settled the question.”

The Logos-centered approach asks:

“Have we understood the testimony truthfully, and what has our interpretation done to human beings?”

The question remains open because the reader remains fallible.

A Theology Capable of Repentance

The primary strength of *Solus Logos* is not that it guarantees correct conclusions.

It does not.

Its strength is that it makes correction theologically possible.

A church can confess that it misused Scripture.

A nation can confess that it sacralized war.

A Christian movement can confess that it confused partisan power with divine favor.

A supporter of Israel can confess that Palestinian suffering was ignored.

A critic of Israel can confess that antisemitic assumptions entered the critique.

An opponent of Iran’s government can confess that Iranians were reduced to their rulers.

An exvangelical can confess that contempt for evangelicals became a new form of dehumanization.

The Logos remains beyond every faction.

This makes repentance possible for all.

Universal accountability does not mean equal responsibility.

The person dropping a bomb and the person beneath it are not equally situated.

The government imposing policy and the civilian enduring it do not possess equal power.

The ruler, voter, pastor, adviser, soldier, and child do not carry identical moral burdens.

Universal accountability means that no identity is incapable of wrongdoing and no identity is incapable of truth.

Looking Up as a Logos Event

The central metaphor of this book can now be interpreted constructively.

Looking up from the Bible does not mean abandoning Scripture for reality.

It means recognizing that the reality before the reader also belongs to God.

The book and the world are not enemies.

The human face is not an interruption of theology.

The neighbor is not external evidence threatening revelation.

The Logos through whom Christians believe all things came into being cannot be confined to the page while the created person before the reader is ignored.

Looking up becomes a Logos event.

The Palestinian is no longer merely part of a prophecy discussion.

The Israeli is no longer merely a representative of a government.

The Iranian is no longer merely an inhabitant of enemy territory.

The evangelical is no longer merely a Trump voter.

The exvangelical is no longer merely an apostate.

Each person exceeds the ideological category.

The Logos restores depth to the human being whom the system had flattened.

The Confession of Solus Logos

The constructive confession may be stated plainly:

I believe that Scripture matters, but my interpretation is not God.

I believe that tradition matters, but tradition can preserve injustice.

I believe that conscience matters, but conscience must remain open to correction.

I believe that reason matters, but reason can serve power.

I believe that evidence matters, and faith does not make falsehood true.

I believe that nations may pursue legitimate security, but no nation embodies divine innocence.

I believe that Jewish life must be protected and antisemitism opposed.

I believe that Palestinian life possesses equal human depth and cannot be erased by prophecy.

I believe that Iran's government may act unjustly, but Iranian civilians are not biblical symbols.

I believe that political leaders must be judged by the consequences of their actions, not by claims that God chose them.

I believe that the Gospel cannot be identified with a party, war, border, government, or president.

I believe that the Logos is truth and therefore cannot require lies.

I believe that the Logos became flesh and therefore cannot make bodies irrelevant.

I believe that the Logos was crucified and therefore stands in judgment upon religious power allied with the state.

I believe that the Logos cannot be possessed by my former evangelical self or by the exvangelical self that condemns it.

I believe that God remains greater than every name invoked to control God.

Beyond the Enclosure

Solus Logos is not a denomination.

It does not provide a liturgy, governing structure, sacramental theology, or complete creed.

It cannot substitute indefinitely for religious community.

Its immediate purpose is more modest.

It creates theological space in which the believer can reject the evangelical enclosure without concluding that every form of faith has collapsed.

Scripture can remain without biblicism.

Christ can remain without Christian nationalism.

Jewish history can remain without Christian Zionist absolutism.

Concern for Israel can remain without indifference to Gaza.

Moral opposition to Iran's rulers can remain without sacred war.

Faith can remain without certainty.

God can remain without the evangelical institution claiming possession of God.

The movement from *Sola Scriptura* to *Solus Logos* is not a movement away from revelation.

It is a refusal to confuse revelation with the mechanisms through which human beings domesticate it.

The Logos remains free.

Free to judge the reader.

Free to judge the church.

Free to judge the nation.

Free to judge Israel and its enemies.

Free to judge Trump and his advisers.

Free to judge the exvangelical critic.

Free to appear in the person whom every political and theological system had rendered invisible.

The final authority is not the Bible held downward as a shield against the world.

It is the living truth before which the Bible, the reader, the church, and the world remain answerable.

The enclosure breaks when the believer accepts that looking up from the page is not necessarily looking away from God.

The Logos may already be standing among the people the interpretation refused to see.

Chapter 7

Can Evangelicalism Repent?

Religious collapse is not inevitable.

Institutions are made by human beings.

What has been constructed can be altered.

Churches can confess error.

Pastors can surrender political access.

Seminaries can change how ministers are formed.

Publishers can elevate voices previously excluded.

Congregations can protect dissent.

Religious organizations can disclose the financial relationships shaping their political witness.

The evangelical label can be separated from Trumpism, Christian nationalism, Christian Zionism, and sacred war.

The possibility of reform remains real because evangelicalism is not one person, denomination, institution, or political faction.

Millions of evangelicals do not accept every claim made in their name.

Some oppose Trump.

Some condemn Christian nationalism.

Some reject war with Iran.

Some criticize the Israeli government.

Some support Israel while refusing to make support unconditional.

Some defend traditional evangelical doctrine while resisting partisan control.

Some pastors have warned that Christianity is being transformed into an instrument of political cruelty.

Some believers remain inside evangelical churches precisely because they hope to preserve a faith they believe the political movement has betrayed.

Resistance exists.

Repentance is still possible.

But resistance and repentance are not the same thing.

A few dissenting articles do not transform an institution.

A denominational statement does not necessarily change congregational life.

A pastor may criticize Christian nationalism while remaining dependent upon the same political donors, media networks, and audiences that sustain it.

A seminary may teach responsible interpretation while its graduates discover that questioning Trump, war, or Christian Zionism can threaten employment.

An evangelical publication may condemn political idolatry while continuing to treat the broader political coalition as the natural home of faithful Christians.

Repentance requires more than exceptions within the system.

It requires alteration of the system.

Repentance Is Not Rebranding

Institutions facing public moral failure often respond through public relations.

They distinguish themselves from extremists.

They emphasize charitable work.

They condemn the most embarrassing statement.

They insist that critics have generalized unfairly.

They point to diverse congregations, humanitarian ministries, missionaries, schools, hospitals, food programs, adoption agencies, and disaster relief.

These distinctions matter.

Not every evangelical is a Christian nationalist.

Not every Trump voter believes Trump is divinely anointed.

Not every supporter of Israel accepts dispensational prophecy.

Not every evangelical pastor acts as a presidential courtier.

Not every conservative Christian supports war with Iran.

No responsible criticism should erase these differences.

But the distinctions can become methods of avoidance.

An institution does not repent by proving that its worst representative does not represent everyone.

It must ask why that representative acquired influence, money, audiences, legitimacy, and access within the movement.

Why did leaders who flattered Trump rise?

Why were leaders who challenged him marginalized?

Why did claims of prophecy receive platforms without meaningful accountability?

Why were political advisers treated as spiritual authorities?

Why did support for one government become a test of biblical faithfulness?

Why were believers who questioned war treated as weak toward evil?

Why did churches speak so confidently about cultural enemies and so cautiously about the violence of their own government?

The answer cannot always be:

Those people were not real evangelicals.

They were real enough to speak at conferences.

They were real enough to appear on religious television.

They were real enough to advise presidents.

They were real enough to raise money.

They were real enough to shape elections.

They were real enough to define evangelicalism publicly.

Rebranding says:

The extremists never represented us.

Repentance says:

We created conditions in which they could represent us.

The First Requirement: Name What Happened

Repentance begins with truthful language.

Evangelical institutions must name what happened during the Trump alliance without retreating into vague phrases such as polarization, political engagement, cultural tension, or imperfect choices.

The movement did not merely become political.

It sacralized a political leader.

It did not merely cooperate with an administration.

Influential leaders portrayed Trump as providentially selected.

It did not merely support national defense.

Religious voices transformed war with Iran into spiritual warfare.

It did not merely defend Israel's existence.

Christian Zionist interpretation made an Israeli government difficult to judge and Palestinian suffering easier to subordinate.

It did not merely affirm Scripture.

It concealed human interpretation beneath the claim that the Bible spoke plainly.

It did not merely lose members because culture became secular.

It drove some believers away by demanding moral concessions they believed Christianity itself prohibited.

These admissions will feel severe.

That is why they matter.

Confession that preserves innocence is not confession.

A church cannot repent of "mistakes" if it refuses to identify who was harmed, which claims were false, what structures rewarded the behavior, and how religious language protected power.

The institution must be able to say:

We treated access as evidence of influence for God.

We confused political success with divine favor.

We distributed moral standards according to party.

We allowed biblical analogies to replace factual and ethical judgment.

We failed to see Palestinian Christians as fellow interpreters.

We failed to see Iranian civilians as more than the population of an enemy state.

We treated dissenters as spiritually suspect.

We made people choose between conscience and belonging.

These statements would not prove Christianity false.

They would prove that Christians remain fallible.

A movement unable to say them makes God responsible for its refusal.

The Second Requirement: End Court Theology

Evangelical leaders must recover moral distance from political rulers.

Religious leaders may advise presidents.

They may advocate policies.

They may pray with public officials.

They may support candidates.

The danger does not lie in all contact with government.

It lies in a relationship in which access depends upon affirmation.

A spiritual adviser should not function as a supplier of sacred legitimacy.

The adviser's role is not to explain why the ruler is chosen.

It is to remind the ruler that no political office removes the need for truth, restraint, mercy, and accountability.

The biblical model is not the courtier who tells the king that every campaign will succeed.

It is the prophet who risks access by telling the king that he is wrong.

If spiritual advisers cannot publicly identify any serious wrongdoing by the ruler they serve, the relationship has already become corrupt.

If they condemn the ruler's opponents more consistently than the ruler's conduct, they are not preserving prophetic independence.

If every prosecution becomes persecution, every victory providence, every threat courage, and every war spiritual warfare, the adviser has ceased to advise.

The adviser interprets the ruler as sacred.

Ending court theology would require visible changes.

Religious leaders should disclose their political and financial relationships.

They should distinguish personal prayer from public endorsement.

They should stop presenting access to the White House as evidence that Christianity has gained influence.

They should refuse biblical titles for living politicians.

They should reject comparisons between presidents and Jesus.

They should avoid prayer events designed primarily as political theater.

They should demonstrate publicly that no leader is too useful to confront.

The test is simple:

Can the adviser tell the ruler something that may end the adviser's access?

If not, the throne has already disciplined the theology.

The Third Requirement: Separate the Pulpit from the Candidate

Evangelical repentance does not require political silence.

Christian faith has public consequences.

Churches may speak about war, poverty, abortion, immigration, racism, religious liberty, sexuality, violence, criminal justice, and the treatment of vulnerable people.

The pulpit becomes corrupt when Christian teaching is organized primarily around the success of a candidate or party.

A church should be able to criticize policies without determining how every member must vote.

It should be able to acknowledge moral complexity without treating complexity as cowardice.

It should be able to say that two candidates are compromised in different ways.

It should be able to condemn falsehood by an ally as clearly as falsehood by an opponent.

The congregation must not be taught that one party embodies Christianity while the other embodies rebellion against God.

No party contains the kingdom of God.

No platform exhausts Christian ethics.

No election settles the standing of the church before God.

A pastor who tells the congregation how to vote may imagine he is offering moral clarity.

He may instead be replacing Christian discernment with partisan obedience.

The healthier task is more demanding.

The pastor should form people capable of evaluating every coalition, including the coalition the pastor prefers.

That requires consistency.

If character matters, it must matter when the favored candidate lacks it.

If truth matters, it must matter when a politically useful claim is false.

If the sanctity of life matters, it must matter beyond the boundary of the favored policy.

If religious liberty matters, it must matter for religious minorities as well as Christians.

If government coercion is dangerous, it must remain dangerous when wielded against disliked populations.

The pulpit must not become campaign infrastructure.

The Fourth Requirement: Protect Dissent

A church cannot claim freedom from political capture if members fear punishment for political disagreement.

The punishment may not be formal.

A dissenting person may not be expelled.

Instead, trust disappears.

The person is no longer invited to lead.

Friends withdraw.

Questions are treated as disruptions.

The believer's faith becomes suspect.

A concern for Palestinians becomes evidence of hostility toward Israel.

Opposition to Trump becomes evidence of progressive influence.

Criticism of war becomes weakness.

Concern for migrants becomes rejection of law.

The person remains in the church but no longer belongs fully.

Repentance requires a protected space for faithful dissent.

A member should be able to ask:

Was this war necessary?

Is this claim about the election true?

Has Christian Zionism distorted our reading?

Are we applying moral standards consistently?

What do Palestinian Christians say?

Are we confusing immigration enforcement with cruelty?

Why do our sermons condemn the sins of one party more often than the sins of the other?

These questions should not threaten membership.

They should be recognized as part of Christian discernment.

Protection of dissent does not mean that every view is equally wise or that churches cannot define theological boundaries.

It means political loyalty must not function as a hidden creed.

A person should not have to conceal moral alarm in order to remain recognized as Christian.

The Fifth Requirement: Follow the Money

Political theology has an economy.

Books are sold.

Conferences are filled.

Media channels attract audiences.

Campaign organizations build mailing lists.

Donations reward urgency.

Prophecy generates attention.

Fear generates engagement.

Access generates prestige.

The strongest rhetoric often produces the strongest financial return.

A ministry that tells believers civilization is approaching collapse may raise more money than one that counsels patience.

A prophecy teacher who identifies current leaders and nations with biblical figures may attract a larger audience than a scholar who explains uncertainty.

A political organization that portrays every election as the final battle for Christianity may mobilize more effectively than one acknowledging democratic complexity.

Financial incentives do not prove that every leader is insincere.

Sincere people can inhabit systems that reward distortion.

Repentance requires institutional transparency.

Who funds the ministry?

Which political organizations share donors, lists, staff, or events?

Does a spiritual adviser benefit materially from access to power?

Do publishers profit from claims that have not been verified?

Are prophecy ministries accountable when predictions fail?

Are congregations informed when political messages originate outside the church?

Does the organization become more alarmist when fundraising declines?

A theology that refuses examination of its financial structure is incomplete.

Money does not explain every belief.

It helps explain which beliefs are amplified.

The Sixth Requirement: Hold Prophecy Accountable

Prophecy without accountability becomes authority without responsibility.

A leader declares that God has revealed an election result.

The prediction fails.

The leader explains that prayer altered the outcome, that the prophecy was conditional, that believers misunderstood the timing, or that spiritual opposition delayed fulfillment.

The authority survives.

The failure becomes evidence of mystery.

This pattern teaches religious communities that confident claims carry no cost.

The prophet receives attention when the prediction is dramatic and retains authority when the prediction fails.

A repentant church would refuse this arrangement.

Claims of divine revelation should be documented.

They should be evaluated publicly.

Failed predictions should be acknowledged clearly.

Leaders who repeatedly make false claims should lose authority.

The congregation should be taught the difference between prayerful judgment, personal impression, political hope, and a declaration that God has spoken.

This is not hostility toward charismatic Christianity.

It is protection of charismatic Christianity from exploitation.

A spiritual gift that cannot be tested becomes a political weapon.

A prophecy that always survives failure is not vulnerable to truth.

Accountability also applies to end-times teaching.

Teachers who assign modern nations fixed biblical identities should explain the interpretive steps.

They should identify alternative Christian readings.

They should distinguish textual claims from political inference.

They should state what evidence would cause them to reconsider.

If nothing could change the conclusion, the teaching should be recognized as an enclosed system rather than knowledge.

The Seventh Requirement: Restore the Burden of War

Evangelical churches must restore the presumption that war demands exceptional moral scrutiny.

War should not be discussed primarily through triumph, strength, retaliation, prophetic fulfillment, or national resolve.

It should be discussed through responsibility.

What caused the conflict?

What alternatives existed?

Who authorized force?

What is the objective?

What would count as success?

How will civilians be protected?

How will the conflict end?

What facts remain uncertain?

What claims come from interested governments?

What happens if the original justification proves false?

Religious communities should hear from veterans, military families, diplomats, civilians, refugees, moral theologians, and people from the country being attacked.

The enemy population must regain individuality.

Iran is not merely its rulers.

Gaza is not Hamas.

Israel is not merely its government.

The United States is not innocent because its leaders describe its violence as defensive.

Prayer for troops must not become a refusal to examine the mission.

Concern for national security must not become spiritual authorization for every military decision.

Christian disagreement over pacifism and just-war reasoning will remain.

That disagreement can be morally serious.

What must end is the use of biblical imagery to remove war from ordinary scrutiny.

No president's violence becomes sacred because pastors stand around him and pray.

The Eighth Requirement: End the Israel Exception

Evangelical repentance requires judging an Israeli government as a government.

This does not mean abandoning concern for Jewish safety.

It does not mean denying Jewish history.

It does not mean accepting every accusation against Israel.

It does not mean excusing Hamas or minimizing October 7.

It means refusing to grant advance biblical authorization to state conduct.

A government is not a covenant.

A military is not a biblical people.

A border is not automatically established by an ancient promise.

An elected leader does not become a prophet by quoting Scripture.

Evangelical churches should teach the differences among biblical Israel, Jewish people, Judaism, Israeli citizens, the State of Israel, and the government currently exercising power.

They should hear Jewish voices that disagree with one another.

They should hear Palestinian Christians as fellow Christians and interpreters, not merely as recipients of aid.

They should recognize Palestinian Muslims as human beings whose rights do not depend upon Christian agreement with Islam.

They should examine the history of Christian Zionism rather than presenting it as the only biblical position.

Ending the Israel exception would not require one evangelical position on every border, settlement, security arrangement, or final-status question.

It would require abandoning the belief that one side's political desires possess automatic divine approval.

Israel would remain capable of legitimate defense.

It would also remain capable of injustice.

Palestinians would remain capable of wrongdoing.

They would also retain rights that do not depend upon innocence.

Moral judgment would begin with conduct and human dignity rather than sacred assignment.

The Ninth Requirement: Distinguish Antisemitism from Moral Criticism

The Gaza conflict has generated genuine antisemitism.

Jewish individuals and institutions have been threatened, stereotyped, collectively blamed, and treated as responsible for actions they did not choose.

Some criticism of Israel has drawn upon ancient conspiracy theories.

Some has denied Jewish historical vulnerability.

Some has celebrated violence against Israeli civilians.

Some has treated Zionism as a single explanation for global evil.

Evangelical reform must oppose these developments clearly.

It must also refuse to use the accusation of antisemitism as a mechanism of silence.

Criticism becomes antisemitic when it targets Jews as Jews, assigns collective guilt, invokes conspiracy, denies Jewish people equal human rights, celebrates violence against Jewish civilians, or applies standards rooted in anti-Jewish prejudice.

Criticism of an Israeli government, military action, settlement policy, political leader, or ideology is not automatically antisemitic.

The distinction requires discipline.

It also applies in other directions.

Condemnation of Hamas does not justify hostility toward Palestinians or Muslims.

Opposition to Iran's government does not justify hatred of Iranians.

Condemnation of evangelical political theology does not justify contempt toward every evangelical believer.

A repentant church would teach how prejudice travels in multiple directions.

It would refuse the moral laziness of assigning innocence or guilt by ethnicity, nationality, or religion.

Opposing antisemitism and opposing Palestinian dehumanization are not competing obligations.

They are the same moral obligation applied consistently.

The Tenth Requirement: Reform Seminary Formation

The political crisis of evangelicalism is also a crisis of ministerial education.

Pastors may graduate with training in biblical languages, theology, preaching, counseling, and church administration while receiving little serious preparation in political theology, propaganda, nationalism, media literacy, international conflict, religious trauma, or the history of evangelical political realignment.

They are then expected to interpret elections, war, immigration, racial conflict, social change, and foreign policy for congregations exposed constantly to partisan media.

The vacuum is filled by whoever speaks with the greatest confidence.

Seminaries committed to reform should teach the history of evangelical involvement with slavery, segregation, colonialism, militarism, anticommunism, the Christian Right, and contemporary nationalism.

This history should not be taught to assign inherited guilt to every present believer.

It should be taught because communities unable to remember their temptations are likely to repeat them.

Students should examine how biblical texts have been used both to authorize and resist oppression.

They should learn that “the Bible plainly says” has been used to support incompatible political arrangements.

Ministerial training should include sustained engagement with Jewish scholars, Palestinian Christians, Muslims, migrants, veterans, survivors of religious abuse, and Christians outside the United States.

The purpose is not to replace evangelical teaching with fashionable opinion.

It is to break the illusion that an American partisan interpretation is Christianity without context.

Pastors should also learn how information systems operate.

They should know how propaganda exploits fear, how manipulated media circulates, how algorithms reward outrage, and how false claims spread through trusted networks.

A minister who cannot evaluate information responsibly should not declare every current event a fulfillment of Scripture.

The Eleventh Requirement: Repair the Harm

Confession without repair remains incomplete.

A church may issue a statement acknowledging political excess.

That does little for people who lost employment, community, reputation, or family relationships because they dissented.

A seminary may publish a new declaration.

That does little for students disciplined for raising questions the institution now considers legitimate.

A denomination may condemn abuse.

That does little if survivors remain unheard and leaders remain protected.

Repair requires identifying those who bore the cost.

Former members should be invited to describe why they left without being treated as evangelistic projects.

Palestinian Christians should be heard without being required to soften their testimony for American comfort.

Jewish communities should be consulted about antisemitism without being used to legitimate every Israeli policy.

Veterans and military families should be given space to speak about moral injury without being asked to protect national mythology.

People publicly accused of unfaithfulness because they opposed Trump or war deserve acknowledgment.

Repair may involve apology.

It may involve financial restitution.

It may involve restored credentials or employment.

It may involve correcting the public record.

It may involve removing leaders who misused authority.

It may involve giving decision-making power to people previously treated only as objects of ministry.

Repair is costly because real repentance changes the distribution of power.

The Twelfth Requirement: Relinquish Power

Evangelical institutions must confront the possibility that political power itself has become an idol.

The desire for influence can be defended through noble purposes.

Protect the unborn.

Protect religious liberty.

Protect families.

Protect Israel.

Protect the nation.

Protect children from harmful ideologies.

Protect churches from government interference.

Each concern can contain legitimate moral substance.

The danger arises when the movement concludes that these goods can be preserved only through control.

Political opponents become existential threats.

Every election becomes the final election.

Every compromise becomes surrender.

Every loss becomes persecution.

The movement becomes incapable of imagining faithful existence without dominance.

But Christianity began without control of the state.

The church does not cease to be the church when it loses access to the palace.

It may become more capable of remembering what it is.

Relinquishing power does not require withdrawal from citizenship.

Evangelicals may vote, organize, advocate, litigate, protest, govern, and seek office.

It requires refusing to treat political control as the condition of God's activity.

It requires accepting that democracy permits opponents to win.

It requires defending rights that protect people outside the church.

It requires distinguishing the loss of privilege from persecution.

It requires abandoning the fantasy that coercion can produce spiritual renewal.

A movement willing to lose power for the sake of truth may recover moral authority.

A movement willing to lose truth for the sake of power has already lost more than an election.

The Thirteenth Requirement: Listen to the People Who Left

Evangelical institutions often interpret exvangelicals without listening to them.

The standard explanations are familiar.

They wanted permission to sin.

They were wounded and became bitter.

They absorbed secular culture.

They never possessed genuine faith.

They followed social media.

They rejected biblical authority because it constrained desire.

Any of these explanations may apply to some individuals.

They become ideological when they are used to prevent former believers from explaining themselves.

Many exvangelicals say they left because the institution became morally unrecognizable.

They saw abuse concealed.

They saw political power sanctified.

They saw LGBTQ people treated with cruelty.

They saw women denied authority while male leaders were protected.

They saw racism minimized.

They saw Trump defended through standards that would never have been applied to an opponent.

They saw Gaza.

They heard war with Iran called spiritual.

They discovered that honest questions threatened belonging.

A repentant institution would not begin by correcting these accounts.

It would listen.

It would ask:

What did you see that we refused to see?

What did remaining require you to deny?

Which teachings formed the conscience that eventually led you out?

What would we have to confess before our invitation to return could be morally credible?

The objective should not be to recover membership numbers.

It should be to recover truth.

The people who left may understand the institution's failures more clearly than the people whose position depends upon its continuity.

The exvangelical may not be the enemy of the church.

He may be the person who looked up first.

Institutional Repentance Cannot Be Demanded from Below

Churches often place the burden of reconciliation upon the injured person.

The former member must forgive.

The critic must speak gently.

The survivor must avoid division.

The dissenter must return.

The person harmed by false teaching must demonstrate that bitterness has not corrupted the heart.

Meanwhile, the institution remains structurally unchanged.

This is not reconciliation.

It is restoration of obedience.

Forgiveness cannot substitute for accountability.

Unity cannot be purchased through silence.

A person who leaves does not owe an institution a return.

The church cannot demand trust because it has used the language of repentance.

Trust must be earned through changed conduct over time.

Some relationships will not be restored.

Some institutions will not survive truthful examination.

Some former believers will never return.

Repentance does not guarantee recovery of what was lost.

It means accepting the consequences of what was done.

The Cost of Real Repentance

Real repentance will cost institutions something they value.

Access.

Money.

Audience.

Prestige.

Political protection.

Donor loyalty.

Membership.

Employment.

Control over the narrative.

A confession without cost is easily produced.

A ministry can denounce extremism while retaining the structures that reward it.

A pastor can preach against idolatry while continuing to offer partisan signals.

A seminary can sponsor dialogue while protecting donors from uncomfortable conclusions.

A denomination can praise racial reconciliation, peacemaking, and justice while disciplining those who apply these principles to powerful allies.

The test is not what an institution says after criticism.

The test is what it is willing to lose in order to become truthful.

A pastor who condemns court theology may lose political relationships.

A publisher that rejects sensational prophecy may lose sales.

A church that protects dissent may lose members demanding unanimity.

A ministry that acknowledges Palestinian suffering may lose donors.

A seminary that teaches political complexity may be accused of abandoning biblical truth.

These losses may be interpreted as failure.

They may be evidence of repentance.

Can the Name Be Saved?

The word *evangelical* comes from the language of good news.

Can a movement remain recognizable as good news when its public identity is associated with aggression, exclusion, sacred war, national grievance, and unconditional defense of political power?

The answer depends upon what is meant by survival.

Evangelicalism can survive numerically without reform.

It possesses churches, schools, universities, seminaries, publishers, broadcasters, political organizations, financial resources, family continuity, and millions of adherents.

It may remain one of the most powerful religious identities in the United States for decades.

Numerical survival is not moral survival.

An institution may grow while losing the meaning of its name.

It may retain the language of Gospel while functioning primarily as the religious identity of a political faction.

The future may contain several evangelicalisms sharing one label.

One may remain centered upon conversion, Scripture, the cross, mission, and personal faith while resisting partisan possession.

Another may function primarily as the religious form of conservative nationalism.

A third may become a cultural ancestry: a population retaining the label because it identifies family, politics, race, region, or social belonging more than a defined theology.

The conflict among these forms will determine what *evangelical* means.

Can Evangelicalism Survive Looking Up?

The deepest question is not whether evangelicalism can survive cultural opposition.

It is whether it can survive moral recognition.

Can it look directly at Trump's conduct without converting every criticism into persecution?

Can it look at the Iran war without declaring presidential violence sacred?

Can it look at Gaza without allowing prophecy to make Palestinians secondary?

Can it hear Jewish fear without using that fear to protect every act of an Israeli government?

Can it hear Palestinian Christians without requiring their testimony to fit an American sacred map?

Can it preserve Scripture without pretending interpretation is absent?

Can it acknowledge that the movement's own conscience may be speaking through the people who leave?

Can it repent institutionally rather than demanding that individuals return submissively?

The answer remains open.

Some churches will reform.

Some will deepen their political identity.

Some will divide.

Some will retain the label while changing its meaning.

Some believers will continue leaving.

Evangelicalism may survive only by ceasing to be what its political form has become.

That would not necessarily be the death of evangelicalism.

It might be the recovery of the evangel.

The Prayer of an Institution

An institution capable of repentance might pray:

God, we claimed to defend Your authority while protecting our own.

We called access influence.

We called dominance courage.

We called political victory providence.

We called criticism persecution.

We called war spiritual.

We called one government biblical.

We called suffering complicated when acknowledging it threatened our alliances.

We demanded repentance from individuals while refusing to confess the structures that rewarded us.

We taught people that truth mattered, then punished them when they applied that teaching to us.

We taught that rulers stood beneath Your judgment, then surrounded a ruler with sacred assurances.

We taught that every life mattered, then distributed grief according to politics and nationality.

We treated people who left as enemies rather than witnesses.

We ask not merely to recover our reputation.

We ask to become capable of truth.

Show us what must end.

Show us whom we must hear.

Show us what we must surrender.

Do not permit our fear of losing evangelicalism to become the reason we lose the Gospel.

Such a prayer would not complete repentance.

It might begin it.

The proof would appear afterward—in changed structures, relinquished privilege, corrected teaching, protected dissent, truthful memory, and repair offered to people the institution once refused to see.

The church would no longer ask first how to bring the exvangelical home.

It would ask what kind of home drove the person away.

And it might discover that the exvangelical was not the one who abandoned faith.

He was the person who looked up first.

Chapter 8

A Faith Capable of Looking Up

The crisis described in this book is not finally a conflict between believers and unbelievers.

It is a conflict within belief.

It concerns what faith requires when inherited interpretation collides with visible suffering.

Donald Trump did not create every contradiction inside American evangelicalism. Christian nationalism, racial hierarchy, apocalyptic politics, partisan media, fear of secularization, and unconditional support for Israel all possess histories deeper than one man.

Trump made the contradictions difficult to conceal.

He revealed how quickly principles described as eternal could be revised when their application threatened political power.

Character mattered until character disqualified the preferred ruler.

Truth mattered until falsehood mobilized the preferred constituency.

Sexual morality mattered until scandal became politically costly.

Respect for law mattered until legal accountability threatened the leader.

Humility mattered until dominance became useful.

The sanctity of life mattered intensely in selected contexts while the lives of foreign civilians remained available for strategic abstraction.

Trump did not force evangelical leaders to abandon these standards.

He offered enough power to reveal which standards they were willing to abandon.

The deeper scandal was not that evangelicals voted for a morally compromised candidate. Democratic politics repeatedly confronts voters with imperfect options.

The scandal was that compromise became sacralization.

The movement could have supported selected policies while maintaining moral independence.

It could have said:

We will vote for this man, but we will not present him as a Christian model.

We will cooperate with this administration, but we will confront its wrongdoing.

We will praise what is just and condemn what is cruel.

We will not transform legal trouble into a passion narrative.

We will not identify criticism of the president with opposition to God.

We will not bless his wars merely because he initiated them.

Instead, influential leaders gradually closed the distance that would have made independent judgment possible.

The bargain became allegiance.

Allegiance became providence.

Providence became theology.

Theology became a court.

Trump Was the Test, Not the Cause

Trump should not be granted too much theological importance.

He is not the sole author of the crisis.

He is the test through which the crisis became visible.

The central question was never simply:

Is Trump a good man?

It was:

Can evangelical institutions judge a useful ruler by the standards they apply to everyone else?

The answer was often no.

Once that failure became evident, another question followed:

What exactly did the institution believe?

Did it believe character mattered?

Did it believe truth mattered?

Did it believe rulers stood beneath God?

Did it believe repentance was necessary?

Or did these principles operate mainly as instruments for judging opponents?

The alliance exposed the difference between a moral teaching and a partisan weapon.

A moral teaching applies most urgently when obedience is costly.

A partisan weapon applies most aggressively to the other side.

Evangelical credibility declined not merely because leaders were inconsistent.

It declined because the inconsistency revealed the political distribution of morality.

Iran Was the Test of Sacred Violence

The war with Iran pushed the contradiction beyond character.

It asked whether presidential violence could be converted into divine purpose.

A government may sometimes conclude that force is necessary.

A Christian may support that conclusion.

Another Christian may reject it.

The moral seriousness of war requires evidence, restraint, proportionality, civilian protection, lawful authority, and a defensible understanding of how violence might end.

Sacred-war rhetoric weakens these obligations.

Iran becomes Persia.

A modern ruler becomes a biblical instrument.

A strategic conflict becomes spiritual warfare.

Political opposition becomes weakness toward evil.

The believer is invited to recognize a sacred pattern before judging the facts.

Once the pattern is accepted, almost any outcome can confirm it.

Victory proves providence.

Escalation proves spiritual resistance.

Negotiation proves the chosen leader’s greatness.

Failed negotiation proves the enemy’s wickedness.

Casualties prove the need for sacrifice.

Public opposition proves that the righteous leader has been abandoned.

A theology capable of explaining every possible outcome has protected itself from truth.

The believer who recognizes this may not lose faith in God.

He may lose faith in those claiming to interpret God.

The religious wound becomes severe because the church supplied the moral language through which the believer learned to resist cruelty.

When the same church demands that cruelty be called courage, the believer faces a choice between conscience and belonging.

Gaza Was the Test of Recognition

Gaza brought the argument down from political language into material reality.

The sacred map encountered the living population.

Christian Zionism had trained many evangelicals to see the modern State of Israel as the continuation or fulfillment of biblical Israel.

Land became promise.

Political sovereignty became prophecy.

Government policy became part of sacred history.

The suffering of Palestinians entered the story after the sacred roles had already been assigned.

This did not require open hatred.

It required only that Palestinian life remain unable to alter the conclusion.

The Palestinian could be pitied.

He could receive humanitarian aid.

She could be prayed for.

He could be acknowledged as unfortunate.

What he could not be allowed to become was morally decisive.

The central theological problem was therefore not complete denial of suffering.

It was the denial that suffering possessed interpretive authority.

The child died.

The family was displaced.

The neighborhood became rubble.

But the prophecy remained untouched.

The suffering was real and powerless.

This is the point at which theology becomes morally self-sealing.

Nothing on the ground can correct it because the sacred map has already determined what the ground is allowed to mean.

The Bible Was Not the Final Problem

The title of this book may sound like an accusation against Scripture:

Too Ugly to Look Up from the Bible.

But the problem is not the act of reading.

It is the use of reading to prevent recognition.

The Bible contains conquest, judgment, covenant, land, election, prophecy, and apocalyptic conflict.

It also contains lament, mercy, hospitality, criticism of kings, condemnation of national injustice, protection of strangers, and warnings to religious communities convinced of their own innocence.

The political interpretation examined here does not arise from taking every text literally.

It arises from strategic selection.

Possession is literal.

Mercy is generalized.

Ancient enemies become modern enemies.

Prophetic criticism remains safely ancient.

Election is permanent.

Judgment is redirected outward.

War becomes geopolitically concrete.

Love of enemies becomes a private aspiration.

The text is not permitted to judge the coalition with the same force it is used to judge the coalition's enemies.

The Bible becomes a shield.

The believer holds the page between the self and the human being.

Looking Up Is Not Looking Away

Looking up from the Bible does not require abandoning it.

It means refusing to use the page as protection from the person.

The believer reads the land promise and then looks at the family living on the land.

She reads the prophecy and then looks at the war justified through it.

He reads about divine judgment and then asks whether the nation invoking judgment has placed itself beyond judgment.

She reads of election and remembers that chosenness intensifies responsibility.

He reads of the cross and asks who currently bears the cost of cooperation between religious and political power.

The text and the world are not enemies.

The human face is not an interruption of theology.

If the Logos became flesh, the body before the reader belongs inside the act of interpretation.

A theology that becomes less responsive to bodies as it becomes more confident in Scripture has misunderstood the meaning of incarnation.

The Faith-Ideology Boundary

Faith and ideology can resemble one another.

Both organize reality.

Both create communities.

Both offer language for suffering.

Both identify moral obligations.

Both can inspire sacrifice.

The difference appears in their relationship to correction.

Ideology protects itself.

Faith remains answerable.

Ideology assigns innocence before examining conduct.

Faith permits the chosen community to be judged.

Ideology treats criticism as hostility.

Faith can receive criticism as a call to repentance.

Ideology needs enemies whose humanity can be reduced.

Faith remains troubled by the enemy's face.

Ideology converts success into vindication.

Faith remembers that empires can win.

Ideology explains suffering without being changed by it.

Faith is capable of being wounded by reality.

The faith-ideology boundary does not separate religious people from secular people.

Secular movements can become ideological.

Religious movements can remain intellectually and morally open.

The boundary runs through every community and every person.

The exvangelical critic can become as enclosed as the evangelical institution.

The former believer may exchange biblical certainty for political certainty.

The saved and lost become enlightened and ignorant.

Heretics become fascists, colonizers, Zionists, liberals, conservatives, or any category through which another person is made morally flat.

Departure does not guarantee repentance.

It creates the opportunity for it.

The Exvangelical Is Not Automatically Right

The exvangelical may see institutional failure clearly and still misjudge the world.

He may treat every evangelical as consciously malicious.

She may dismiss every conservative concern as fabricated.

He may romanticize forces opposed to the United States or Israel.

She may allow justified anger at Christian Zionism to become indifference toward Jewish fear.

He may use *Zionist* as an all-purpose category of guilt.

She may treat Israeli civilians as embodiments of a state rather than human beings.

The cure for selective sympathy is not sympathy redistributed selectively in the opposite direction.

The Israeli mother must remain visible.

The Palestinian father must remain visible.

The Iranian civilian must remain visible.

The evangelical grandmother who sincerely fears social collapse must remain visible.

Recognition does not eliminate judgment.

It prevents judgment from becoming dehumanization.

The exvangelical witness gains moral force only when it refuses the innocence it once claimed inside the church.

The Continuing Evangelical

Not every believer troubled by Trump, Iran, or Gaza must leave evangelicalism.

Some will remain and resist.

They may believe the word still names a faith centered upon conversion, Scripture, the cross, mission, and personal relationship with God.

They may reject the claim that the political coalition owns the identity.

Their presence matters.

A movement should not be defined only by its loudest courtiers.

Faithful resistance can occur inside institutions.

The remaining evangelical faces a difficult task.

He must oppose political capture without allowing the institution to use his presence as proof that no capture occurred.

She must distinguish loyalty to people from loyalty to structures.

He must decide when reform remains possible and when continued participation supplies legitimacy to what he opposes.

No universal rule can settle that decision.

Leaving can be courageous.

Remaining can be courageous.

Leaving can be avoidance.

Remaining can be avoidance.

The moral question is what truth requires in the actual circumstances.

Can Evangelicalism Survive?

Evangelicalism can survive numerically without looking up.

It possesses churches, schools, seminaries, publishers, broadcasting networks, political organizations, donors, family continuity, and millions of adherents.

It may remain politically powerful.

Numerical survival is not theological survival.

A movement can retain its institutions while losing the meaning of its name.

Evangelical arises from the language of good news.

Can a movement remain recognizable as good news when its public identity becomes associated with grievance, domination, exclusion, sacred war, and unconditional protection of political power?

It may continue as a political identity.

It may continue as a cultural ancestry.

It may continue as a voting category.

Whether it continues as an evangel is another question.

Evangelicalism may need to lose much of what it has become in order to remain what its name claims.

It may need to lose court access.

It may need to lose political certainty.

It may need to lose donor networks built upon fear.

It may need to lose prophecy industries that survive failed predictions.

It may need to lose the belief that America requires evangelical control.

It may need to lose the Israel exception.

It may need to lose members who prefer power to repentance.

These losses could be interpreted as decline.

They may be purification.

The movement may survive only by ceasing to defend its present form.

Christianity Does Not Need the Coalition

The collapse of evangelical political authority does not entail the collapse of Christianity.

God does not depend upon Republican victories.

Christ does not disappear when conservative judges are not appointed.

The Gospel does not fail when churches lose cultural privilege.

Scripture does not become false when an inherited interpretation proves mistaken.

Christianity existed before the United States.

It existed before modern evangelicalism.

It existed before the State of Israel.

It existed before dispensationalism.

It existed before Trump.

The coalition may collapse.

God does not collapse with it.

This distinction is essential because political evangelicalism often presents its own survival as the survival of faith.

Every election becomes final.

Every cultural loss becomes persecution.

Every limitation upon power becomes an attack upon Christianity.

The movement creates a God who must be protected by political control.

A larger faith releases God from that dependency.

Solus Logos

The constructive alternative proposed in this book is not a new institution possessing infallible truth.

It is a confession of universal accountability.

Solus Logos.

The church is not the Logos.

The Bible reader is not the Logos.

The president is not the Logos.

The nation is not the Logos.

The State of Israel is not the Logos.

The exvangelical conscience is not the Logos.

This book is not the Logos.

The Logos remains beyond possession.

This transcendence allows every human mediation to be judged.

Scripture remains sacred testimony, but the interpretation remains fallible.

Conscience remains necessary, but conscience remains corrigible.

Tradition remains valuable, but tradition can preserve injustice.

Reason remains indispensable, but reason can serve power.

Experience remains morally important, but suffering does not make every conclusion of the sufferer right.

No source eliminates the need for discernment.

The Logos is not a mechanism for certainty.

It is the truth before which certainty must answer.

What Remains After Certainty

The believing exvangelical may emerge from the enclosure with fewer doctrines.

He may no longer know exactly how Scripture is inspired.

She may no longer possess a detailed account of salvation.

He may no longer know whether every Christian claim about the future is true.

She may no longer know how prayer works.

He may no longer identify one church as uniquely faithful.

What remains may appear fragile.

A belief that truth cannot require lies.

A belief that mercy cannot require blindness.

A belief that no nation embodies complete innocence.

A belief that no population embodies complete guilt.

A belief that the person beneath the bomb matters more than the analogy used to explain the bombing.

A belief that the neighbor can interrupt theology.

A belief that repentance is possible.

A continuing address to God.

This faith may not satisfy institutions that measure belief through doctrinal completeness.

It may be morally substantial.

The Final Choice

The ultimate choice is not between the Bible and the world.

The Bible exists within history.

It is written, transmitted, translated, interpreted, printed, preached, and lived through human communities.

The world also enters theological judgment.

Creation, incarnation, neighbor, suffering, action, consequence, and responsibility are not external to faith.

The choice is between two ways of believing.

One survives by enclosure.

It possesses answers before encountering people.

It assigns sacred roles before examining conduct.

It protects certainty from evidence.

It identifies criticism with persecution.

It reads suffering through prophecy until suffering loses the power to judge.

It cannot repent because every failure can be incorporated into the plan.

The other remains open.

It reads Scripture while acknowledging interpretation.

It values tradition while permitting correction.

It honors conscience while examining conscience.

It listens to people on the ground.

It distinguishes populations from governments and governments from God.

It refuses to transform political success into divine favor.

It recognizes that truth may arrive through the person its theology had excluded.

The first appears strong because nothing can overturn it.

The second appears fragile because it can be wounded by reality.

But the capacity to be wounded may be the condition of moral life.

A conscience that cannot be disturbed is not faithful.

It is anesthetized.

A theology that cannot be contradicted is not secure.

It is sealed.

A church that cannot repent is not defending God.

It is defending itself from God.

The Right to See

The exvangelical crisis is often described as a loss of faith.

Sometimes it is.

Some people leave evangelicalism and eventually abandon belief in God.

Others become agnostic.

Others join different Christian traditions.

Others retain no formal religious identity.

The more consequential possibility examined here is that the crisis represents a redistribution of faith away from institutions that can no longer contain the consciences they formed.

Trump, Iran, and Gaza do not settle the question of God.

They reveal what religious institutions will defend when doctrine collides with power.

Some believers respond by holding the Bible more tightly around the world.

Others look up.

They may lose certainty.

They may lose churches, friendships, language, status, identity, and home.

They may carry their former evangelical selves for the rest of their lives.

What they recover may be more fundamental than certainty.

They recover the right to see.

They see that a government is not a covenant.

They see that a president is not providence.

They see that war is not made sacred by prayer.

They see that no ancient enemy-name can contain a modern population.

They see that Palestinians and Israelis possess human depth simultaneously.

They see that an Iranian child is not Persia.

They see that Scripture does not cease to matter when interpretation becomes visible.

They see that conscience need not be surrendered to belonging.

They see that God may be greater than the religious world they left.

The Person Who Looked Up

The institution may call the exvangelical unfaithful.

It may say he was deceived.

It may say she wanted permission to sin.

It may say he surrendered to secular culture.

It may say she chose human emotion over biblical truth.

Those possibilities cannot be ruled out in every case.

But another interpretation must be permitted.

The person left because remaining required a deeper unfaithfulness.

He was asked to call political power providence.

She was asked to call violence spiritual.

He was asked to make Palestinian suffering secondary to prophecy.

She was asked to make uncertainty a greater sin than cruelty.

He was asked to distrust his conscience when it objected to the unequal distribution of human worth.

The person did not necessarily stop believing.

The person stopped granting exclusive authority to those who claimed to define belief.

The exvangelical was not always the enemy of the church.

He may have been the person who looked up first.

A Final Confession

I am an evangelical because evangelicalism remains part of the person I became.

I am responsible for what I believed and defended in its name.

I carry its language, its moral seriousness, its fears, its injuries, and its contradictions.

I am also an exvangelical because I no longer accept the institution's authority over God.

I no longer believe that character becomes irrelevant when power is useful.

I no longer believe that political victory proves divine favor.

I no longer believe that war becomes righteous when spiritual advisers bless it.

I no longer believe that modern governments inherit the innocence of biblical symbols.

I no longer believe that ancient promises make present people disposable.

I no longer believe that questioning Trump means rejecting Christianity.

I no longer believe that criticism of an Israeli government means hatred of Jews.

I no longer believe that opposing Iran's rulers requires reducing Iranians to Persia.

I no longer believe that certainty is a greater virtue than honesty.

I no longer believe that refusing to see is the same as trusting Scripture.

I have looked up from the Bible.

I have not found the world empty of God.

I have found God harder to control.

I have found God outside the coalition.

I have found God beyond the sacred map.

I have found God among people whom my theology had made invisible.

Perhaps I did not leave God.

Perhaps I left the place where I had been taught never to look for God.

A faith capable of looking up cannot guarantee that it will always see correctly.

It can remain capable of correction.

That may be the beginning of repentance.

It may also be the beginning of faith.

Epilogue

A Letter to the God I Still Believe In

God,

I did not leave because I proved that You do not exist.

I did not conduct an experiment and find the universe empty.

I did not solve a philosophical problem and eliminate the possibility of transcendence.

I did not discover one contradiction in Scripture and conclude that every prayer had been spoken into silence.

I left because the people who spoke most confidently in Your name made You increasingly difficult to recognize.

They told me that character mattered.

Then they excused character when power became available.

They told me that truth mattered.

Then they defended falsehood when falsehood served the coalition.

They told me that humility was a Christian virtue.

Then they celebrated domination as courage.

They told me that rulers stood beneath Your judgment.

Then they surrounded a ruler with advisers who called his success providence, his enemies persecutors, and his violence part of a spiritual war.

They told me that repentance was necessary.

Then they demanded repentance from everyone except themselves.

I watched them convert Donald Trump from a political compromise into a sacred instrument.

At first, they said that no candidate was perfect.

Then they said that You use imperfect people.

Then they said his imperfections proved that the glory belonged to You.

Then they said attacks upon him were attacks upon Your purpose.

Then they compared his suffering with the suffering of biblical figures.

Finally, they placed his wars inside a conflict between Your kingdom and the kingdom of evil.

I do not know exactly when political support became theology.

Perhaps it happened gradually enough that no one had to admit choosing it.

Perhaps each defense seemed small.

Perhaps each compromise appeared necessary.

Perhaps everyone believed the next victory would justify the last surrender.

But eventually the distance disappeared.

The president was no longer beneath the faith.

The faith had been arranged around the president.

I looked at Trump and was told to see Cyrus.

I looked at prosecution and was told to see persecution.

I looked at aggression and was told to see strength.

I looked at political survival and was told to see Your hand.

I looked at war and was told to see spiritual warfare.

I looked at Iran and was told to see Persia.

I looked at Gaza and was told to see prophecy.

I looked at Palestinians and was told to remember the promise.

I looked at dead children and was told not to let emotion replace biblical truth.

But what I saw did alter what I believed.

Perhaps that was the moment I began to leave.

Not because compassion became more authoritative than truth.

Because I could no longer believe that truth required the suppression of compassion.

I saw that a sacred map can hide a human being.

I saw that prophecy can become permission.

I saw that prayer can become court ceremony.

I saw that biblical certainty can become fear of evidence.

I saw that a church can demand the betrayal of the conscience it helped form.

You were presented to me as the God of truth.

What was I supposed to do when those claiming Your authority defended lies?

You were presented to me as the God of mercy.

What was I supposed to do when mercy became weakness?

You were presented to me as the judge of rulers.

What was I supposed to do when religious leaders placed rulers beyond judgment?

You were presented to me as the creator of every human life.

What was I supposed to do when foreign lives became strategic abstractions?

Perhaps I should have remained and fought.

Perhaps leaving surrendered the institution to people more willing to use it.

Perhaps I mistook exhaustion for courage.

Perhaps I judged believers too harshly because I could no longer tolerate the person I had been among them.

I do not ask You to certify every conclusion I have reached since leaving.

I know how easily a person can exchange one enclosure for another.

I know that exvangelicals can become as certain as the institutions they condemn.

I know that anger can become identity.

I know that righteous language can conceal contempt.

I know that sympathy can be selective even when it calls itself universal.

I know that I can see Palestinian suffering and fail to hear Jewish fear.

I know that I can condemn an Israeli government and begin to speak as though every Israeli were the government.

I know that I can oppose Christian Zionism and become careless about antisemitism.

I know that I can condemn American war and romanticize the rulers who oppose America.

I know that I can treat every Trump voter as though one explanation contained millions of people.

I know that leaving does not make me innocent.

That may be the hardest confession.

I was not merely deceived.

Some deceptions were attractive.

Certainty was attractive.

Belonging was attractive.

Being among the chosen was attractive.

Having an enemy was attractive.

Believing that history had already assigned me to the righteous side was attractive.

A providential nation was attractive.

A sacred political leader was attractive.

A Bible that answered every question before I encountered it was attractive.

The system did not survive only because leaders imposed it.

It survived because people like me found shelter inside it.

It made the world intelligible.

It named danger.

It explained loss.

It turned fear into vigilance.

It turned power into protection.

It turned political victory into reassurance that You had not abandoned us.

I confess that I sometimes preferred a controllable God.

A God whose will could be found in the approved translation, sermon, party platform, prophecy chart, or election result.

A God who could be located inside the coalition.

A God who blessed the people I already trusted and judged the people I already feared.

A God who did not require me to see too much.

When I looked at Israel, I saw biblical meaning before I saw government policy.

When I looked at Gaza, I saw a conflict before I saw families.

When I looked at Iran, I saw an enemy state before I saw Iranians.

When I looked at migrants, I saw a national problem before I saw people.

When I looked at political opponents, I saw threats before I saw neighbors.

When I looked at those leaving the church, I saw rebellion before I heard testimony.

The theology did not always tell me to hate.

It taught me how not to see.

That was enough.

I ask forgiveness for the suffering I made abstract.

I ask forgiveness for every time I treated another person's pain as an inconvenient fact inside a more important narrative.

I ask forgiveness for the certainty I called faith.

I ask forgiveness for the questions I refused to ask because I feared where they might lead.

I ask forgiveness for confusing loyalty with truth.

I ask forgiveness for defending Your reputation more urgently than I defended people harmed in Your name.

I ask forgiveness for making political success a sign of Your favor.

I ask forgiveness for every time I believed that the sins of my enemies explained their actions while the sins of my allies merely revealed that You use imperfect people.

I ask forgiveness for the unequal distribution of my grief.

I do not know what forgiveness means for an institution.

Individuals confess.

Individuals apologize.

Individuals attempt repair.

But institutions are made of habits, money, offices, platforms, donors, seminaries, publishers, voting networks, friendships, fears, and memories.

Who speaks for the institution?

Who receives forgiveness?

Who performs repentance?

Who restores the people who were pushed out?

Who repairs the lives damaged by teachings that are later quietly abandoned?

Who apologizes to the Palestinian Christian whose testimony was ignored?

Who apologizes to the veteran whose moral injury was covered by patriotic prayer?

Who apologizes to the believer called unfaithful for opposing a war?

Who apologizes to the child taught that questions endangered salvation?

Who apologizes to the person who left because remaining required silence?

Perhaps institutional repentance begins when leaders stop asking how to recover the people who departed and ask what kind of home drove them away.

Perhaps it begins when the church does not demand forgiveness before surrendering power.

Perhaps it begins when confession costs access, money, reputation, or control.

Perhaps it begins when the church hears the exvangelical not as a target to be reclaimed but as a witness.

God, I do not know whether I still belong within Christianity in the way others define belonging.

I do not know which doctrines I affirm with sufficient precision.

I do not know how inspiration works.

I do not know how prayer changes events.

I do not know which descriptions of salvation are true.

I do not know what happens after death.

I do not know whether doubt is a stage, a destination, or simply the form faith now takes.

But I still speak to You.

That fact does not prove anything to another person.

It does not prove that You are listening.

It does not establish theology.

It does not settle history.

It means only that the relationship has not ended inside me.

I still believe that truth cannot require lies.

I still believe that mercy cannot require blindness.

I still believe that no nation contains all righteousness.

I still believe that no population contains all guilt.

I still believe that the person beneath the bomb matters more than the analogy used to explain the bombing.

I still believe that the neighbor can interrupt theology.

I still believe that repentance is possible, even if I no longer believe it belongs only to individuals.

I still believe that power must remain answerable.

I still believe that the sacred cannot be recognized by success alone.

I still believe that the crucified person judges the court more profoundly than the court can interpret the crucifixion.

I still believe that the Word became flesh.

If that is true, then bodies matter.

Palestinian bodies matter.

Israeli bodies matter.

Iranian bodies matter.

American bodies matter.

Migrant bodies matter.

The bodies of soldiers matter.

The bodies of hostages matter.

The bodies of prisoners matter.

The bodies of children matter.

No prophecy can make them scenery.

No government can make them symbols without remainder.

No theology can explain them away and remain unchanged.

Perhaps this is all I mean now by faith:

I refuse to believe that truth and mercy are finally enemies.

I refuse to believe that You require blindness.

I refuse to believe that cruelty becomes righteous when committed by my nation, my church, or my political allies.

I refuse to believe that a Bible held in my hand makes the human face before me less authoritative as a moral demand.

I do not ask to recover the person I was.

I do not ask for the return of certainty.

Certainty gave me shelter.

It also allowed me not to see.

I ask instead for courage to remain corrigible.

Teach me to say, “I was wrong.”

Teach me to hear people whose testimony threatens my moral comfort.

Teach me to distinguish compassion from sentimentality and judgment from dehumanization.

Teach me to oppose antisemitism without silencing Palestinians.

Teach me to defend Palestinians without denying Jewish fear.

Teach me to oppose Iran’s rulers without treating Iranians as enemies by birth.

Teach me to judge American power without imagining America uniquely evil.

Teach me to judge Trump without reducing every supporter to the worst motives of the movement.

Teach me to remember that leaving evangelicalism did not remove my capacity for self-deception.

Teach me to see.

I have looked up from the Bible.

I have not closed it.

I read it differently now.

I no longer assume that I occupy the role of the faithful person.

I may be Pharaoh.

I may be the royal prophet reassuring the king.

I may be the priest protecting the institution.

I may be the crowd demanding order.

I may be the disciple who misunderstands the kingdom.

I may be the person passing the wounded stranger because my theology has already assigned more important duties.

I may also be the wounded person.

I may be the one who left Jerusalem and does not know whether there is a road back.

I may be the person asking whether You exist outside the place where I was taught to find You.

When I looked up, I found You harder to control.

You were not confined to the coalition.

You were not secured by the election.

You were not identical to the government.

You were not contained within the prophecy chart.

You were not protected by our certainty.

You appeared, if You appeared at all, among the people the system had made inconvenient.

In the Palestinian Christian whose testimony disturbed American theology.

In the Israeli family terrified by violence.

In the Iranian civilian reduced to a biblical name.

In the migrant treated as an invasion.

In the veteran unable to call war glorious.

In the believer who asked a question and lost a community.

In the exvangelical who continued praying after the church had declared the departure apostasy.

Perhaps I did not leave You.

Perhaps I left the place where I had been taught never to look for You.

Perhaps faith after evangelicalism is not possession of a better map.

Perhaps it is the willingness to walk without one while remaining answerable to truth.

Perhaps *Solus Logos* means that You remain beyond every system I build, including the system through which I now criticize the old one.

The Logos is not mine.

The Logos is not evangelical.

The Logos is not exvangelical.

The Logos is not American.

The Logos is not Israeli.

The Logos is not Palestinian.

The Logos is not conservative or progressive.

The Logos judges every identity without erasing any person.

I do not know whether I can live consistently beneath that judgment.

I know only that I no longer want a God who guarantees my innocence.

I want the truth, even if truth exposes me.

I want mercy, even if mercy includes people I fear.

I want justice, even if justice requires surrendering advantages I have called blessings.

I want a faith capable of looking up.

A faith that can see the world without closing the Bible.

A faith that can read the Bible without closing the world.

A faith that does not need dead children to remain abstractions.

A faith that does not make rulers sacred.

A faith that does not turn nations into gods.

A faith that does not interpret every criticism as persecution.

A faith that can repent before it is forced to collapse.

I do not know whether evangelicalism can become that faith.

I do not know whether I can.

But I still speak to You.

I still believe that speaking truthfully matters.

I still believe that the person before me is not an obstacle to theology.

I still believe that no institution owns Your name.

I still believe that the Word became flesh.

I still believe that the flesh must be seen.

That is where I remain.

Not inside certainty.

Not outside hope.

Looking up.

Notes on Sources and Method

This book presents an argument of theological and political interpretation. It does not claim that a national longitudinal study has proved that Donald Trump, the war with Iran, or Gaza has caused a measurable number of people to adopt the identity *exvangelical*.

The phrase “creating exvangelicals” identifies a proposed mechanism:

A religious community connects political allegiance with religious fidelity.

A believer encounters conduct that conflicts with the moral teachings through which the believer was formed.

Religious authorities sanctify, excuse, minimize, or conceal that conduct.

The believer loses confidence not necessarily in God, but in the institutions claiming authority to interpret God.

Departure, reconstruction, or religious disaffiliation follows.

Research on religious switching supports the broader conclusion that people frequently leave religious communities because of moral conflict, institutional scandal, political teaching, mistreatment of vulnerable people, and loss of confidence in religious leadership. The available evidence does not demonstrate that every political disagreement results in religious departure.

The term *moral injury* is used interpretively rather than diagnostically. The book does not diagnose evangelical believers with a psychiatric condition. It uses the concept to describe the moral and spiritual wound that can arise when trusted authorities pressure people to approve actions that violate their deeply held convictions.

The legal characterization of Israel’s conduct in Gaza requires continuing precision. Israel rejects the accusation of genocide and maintains that its military actions followed the Hamas-led attacks of October 7, 2023, and were directed toward legitimate security objectives. The International Court of Justice had not issued a final judgment on the merits of South Africa’s Genocide Convention case when this edition was completed on July 31, 2026. Other international investigators and organizations have reached stronger conclusions. The book therefore treats genocide as a grave and substantiated allegation, a conclusion accepted by some investigators, and a contested legal and moral characterization—not as a final ICJ judgment already rendered.

The distinction among Jewish people, Judaism, Israeli citizens, the State of Israel, its government, and Christian interpretations of Israel is essential throughout the book. Criticism of government policy is not a judgment against Jews. Opposition to antisemitism does not require

unconditional support for an Israeli government. Defense of Palestinian humanity does not justify denial of Jewish history, Jewish fear, or violence against Israeli civilians.

The same rule applies to every population discussed. Iranian civilians are not identical to Iran's rulers. Palestinians are not identical to Hamas. Israelis are not identical to their government. Americans are not identical to an administration acting in their name. Evangelical believers are not identical to their most visible political leaders.

"Court theology," "closed biblicism," "the sacred map," and *Solus Logos* are analytical terms developed in this book. They describe patterns of authority and interpretation. They are not medical diagnoses, legal findings, or claims that every person within a religious community holds the same beliefs.

Current events, polling, government leadership, military conditions, and legal proceedings may change after publication. Dates have been retained so readers can distinguish what was known when the manuscript was completed from later developments.

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Acknowledgments

This book developed through an extended collaboration between Douglas C. Youvan and OpenAI’s GPT-5.6 Thinking.

The author supplied the central questions, arguments, theological direction, judgments, corrections, and continuing editorial decisions. The language model assisted with research organization, structural development, drafting, revision, and the transformation of the original long-form paper into a Kindle-oriented manuscript.

Artificial intelligence does not possess moral responsibility for a published argument. Responsibility for the final selection, interpretation, and presentation of the material remains with the author.

The book also depends upon journalists, researchers, polling organizations, legal institutions, religious scholars, humanitarian workers, and witnesses whose work made the factual discussion possible. Inclusion of a source does not imply that its authors agree with the interpretation developed here.

Special acknowledgment is owed to people whose experiences challenge the categories imposed upon them: exvangelicals who continue to seek God, evangelicals who resist political capture from within their churches, Palestinian Christians whose testimony is often subordinated to Western prophecy, Jewish critics of antisemitism and state violence, civilians living beneath war, and people who lost communities because conscience made silence impossible.

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